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# *Hunting and Fishing*

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IN NORTH AMERICA



# HUNTING & FISHING

*in North America*

*by* MICHAEL CRAMOND

*With drawings by*

OLAUS J. MURIE

NORMAN : UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA PRESS

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First edition.

To Bill Gulick  
who made it possible  
and to Thelma  
who possibly made it



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## *Preface*

**A**BOUT THE ONLY really necessary things for the enjoyment of hunting and fishing are a jackknife, a piece of old inner tube, an old shoe tongue, a piece of string, and a bent pin. Of course, a sense of humor, an infinite fund of patience, and the heart of a little boy will help, too. Many of us can remember cutting a crotched branch to a nice fit for the hand, and laboriously splitting a red inner tube in order to get two evenly matched strands, then making a pouch for the stone from a prized piece of shoe tongue. And if you were like me, you got your first grouse with the resulting slingshot. I can remember many a small trout I took with scientific gear consisting of a bent pin and cotton thread tied to a fresh willow pole and baited with a wiggly-brown earthworm.

It seems that, of latter days, the pursuits of field and stream have become much more complicated, but I can truthfully say that the pleasure has been neither lessened nor magnified. It remains the same—a tiddler trout taken in a two-foot-wide mountain stream or a two-hundred-pound sailfish horsed in the broad expanse of the ocean's Gulf Stream. The first delighted surprise as a grouse lay kicking on its side from the tremulously aimed stone from a slingshot, and the tremendous crash of a moose or grizzly hitting the undergrowth from the smashing shock of a telescope-sighted, high-power rifle are quite of a piece. It seems only that, as we grow older, the drink must become stronger in

order to produce the same effect. But I luckily enjoy both taking big game on my own and the vicarious pleasure of showing my seven-year-old son and five-year-old daughter how Daddy used to do it. Believe me, the children are kind to us in allowing us to relive once again the ecstasies of our own youth.

For years, I have spent my indoor hours reading the articles and books written by such men as Jack O'Connor of *Outdoor Life*, Warren Page of *Field and Stream*, Kip Farrington, the salt-water editor of the same magazine, Pete Brown of *Sports Afield*, and the panel of experts for *The American Rifleman*. I assure them, as I assure you, that I have never considered myself more than a novice at either hunting or fishing. I still miss big animals like moose and bear, and I recently established a personal record by allowing eleven shootable pheasants to get up in front of me in one afternoon, all within gun range, without disturbing a feather on any of them. It is for dubs like me that the gun editors noted above continue to write. We *need* advice!

Recently I took my wife and small daughter and son for a day's fishing along the Pacific Coast. My daughter caught a four-pound silver perch, my son a three-pound tommy cod, my wife a one-pound rainbow perch, and I—well, it was like this: the fish just weren't bitin' where I was fishin'.

These are some of the incidents that allow me to claim amateur status still, after many happy years of hunting and fishing.

Hunting and fishing are for everyone, from the youngster with practically no equipment to the desk man who can afford little, and, finally, to the man whose means will permit him to acquire and maintain the kind of rod and gun collection that one associates with Abercrombie and Fitch. Equating the pleasures of these three groups is pretty easy, and I am not going to make the mistake of denying to any of them the vicarious thrill of planning and slowly, or swiftly, acquiring the tools that, even in contemplation, gladden their hearts.

But I have little patience with people who employ their equipment only in armchairs. I know one man who has thirty-five modern guns, twenty-two rods with matching reels, single and double tapered lines, and so many fishing lures that even



## Preface

he doesn't know their range or their usefulness. Recently I guided him on a hunting trip. He took along a fine scope-mounted .270 rifle, but he was so afraid of marring the high finish of the stock that he took it out of the case only twice—and then for the principal purpose of allowing me to admire it. When he saw four moose all at once, he left that smooth-acting rifle in the Jeep and followed one of the other members of the party, who downed a large bull with a well-worn Model 94 Winchester .30-30. My friend of the arsenal and fishing equipment collection was too busy caring for his equipment.

I had rather be a ten-year-old kid with a willow pole, hook and line, and a slingshot with time for hunting and fishing than a wealthy old man with a mansion full of unused equipment. And if you are going to follow me through these pages, you'd better not be looking for anything very scientific, because I don't know anything very scientific. I just like to hunt and fish.

There are a few of my friends who have had more faith in me than I deserve, and their patience with me, and hard work besides, were totally responsible for the better parts of this book. That they may not go unheralded, as they desire to be, this will serve to thwart them, and I callously expose them:

The editors at the University of Oklahoma Press, who started it with a flat tire and finished it with a headache; Glenn P. Holman, who became a patron as well as a friend; Jack Lillington, better known as the beloved outdoor columnist "Pintail," who was a friend and became a better one; Olaus J. Murie, who made up for my faults in photography and thereby paved the way for a better book; and the legion of hunting and fishing companions who showed me how and why, Jerry Breen, Don Brown, "Pancho," Bob Kuhn, Charlie Winch, Vern Norris, Billy Nishihara, George Yung, Frank Smith, Bill Rae, Sid Tabbutt, Hans & Bill, Pete Mafeo, Norm and Bill MacDonald, Jack Lacterman, and Mother and Dad. To them and all the others, my warmest thanks.

MICHAEL CRAMOND

*Caulfeild, British Columbia*

May 10, 1953

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*Book I*

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*Hunting*







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## *Hunting Equipment and Methods*

SUPPORTING RIFLES and shotguns reached their modern forms late in the nineteenth century. Most of the improvements existing today stem from basic principles and inventions of three-quarters of a century ago. Thus the high-velocity, flat-shooting rifles of bolt-action design had their origins in the Mauser patents in Germany of the middle eighteen-eighties; the much used .30-30, with few exceptions always a lever-action gun, to the Winchester Model 94, perfected in 1894; double-barrel hammerless shotguns to a variety of British practice in the last half of the nineteenth century; and slide-action and automatic rifles and shotguns to the work of American inventors, John Browning principal among them, before and shortly after the new century had opened.

When a youngster graduates from a slingshot to his first gun, he may as well have the firearm that he will use for the rest of his life. For our century has produced two developments, light weight and reduced recoil, which make the high-powered rifle almost as easy to handle as an airgun. Today's alloys and engineering methods have given us great strength in spite of light weight in our firearms, and progressive burning powders and recoil pads have taken the sting out of shooting.

The gun a man picks may not be the one he can afford, but a little waiting and a good deal of saving will usually produce the results needed for a lifetime of hunting pleasure. Let us have

a look at the rifle first. As previously indicated, it can be a bolt-action firearm for highest velocity and killing power over a considerable distance, from 200 up to 500 yards, especially in the mountainous areas of the West, parts of Mexico, Canada, and Alaska, where shooting is often in "open" country, as distinguished from the brushy characteristics of the eastern areas. The bolt-action rifle remains, moreover, the most accurate of guns. It can be had in a wide variety of calibers, from .25 to .375, suitable for big game ranging from deer to the largest bear and moose. Bullet weights vary from as little as 87 grains in .257 Roberts (one of the .25 caliber cartridges) to 300 grains and more in caliber .375. Velocities run from 2,800 feet per second at muzzle to as high as 3,540 in various calibers, but in general it is the combination of satisfactory bullet weight and relatively high velocity in these guns that has accounted for many remarkable feats in hunting and marksmanship during the past twenty-five years.

I will make no attempt to go into ballistic details, because they would require a book in themselves; besides the ground has already been covered brilliantly by Jack O'Connor in his recent book, *The Big-Game Rifle*. Ballistics tables and performances are handled in scientific detail and accuracy in Volumes 1 and 2 of *Reloading Information from the American Rifleman*, published by the National Rifle Association. The history, forms, and uses of rifles have been treated authoritatively by Philip B. Sharpe in *The Rifle in America*. But to the general information I have given on the bolt-action rifle, a few useful details may be added.

Generally speaking, the smaller the caliber, the lighter the projectile: thus, the .257 Roberts uses an 87-grain bullet at a muzzle velocity of just at 3,200 feet per second, and a muzzle energy of 2,005 foot pounds. At the other pole the .375 uses as its heaviest factory load a bullet weighing 300 grains, at a muzzle velocity of 2,540 feet per second, and a muzzle energy of no less than 4,300 foot pounds!

But these facts, impressive though they may be, are less important in ordinary hunting than the effect on game, on the one

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hand, and on the hunter, on the other. Smaller caliber, lighter weight bullets are for smaller game; the heavier calibers and heavier loads are for bringing down big animals, notably elk, caribou, moose, and the largest bear. At the butt end of the gun, the recoil in the smaller calibers would not offend a woman, whereas the recoil in a .375 is enough to make a strong man wince.

I have often been asked, Is it necessary for the hunter to possess two rifles, one for whitetail deer, for example, the other for elk? I don't think so. For the man who can really afford only one rifle, the leading armies of the world provided a solution more than fifty years ago. Such calibers as the German 7-mm. Mauser (7x57), .303 British, U. S. .30-'06, and 8-mm. Mauser (8x57J or JS) were intended to serve under widely varying conditions of range, terrain, and penetration. It is not an accident, therefore, that the .30-'06 is one of the most widely used calibers in the world for sporting purposes. Since cartridges are available almost everywhere in bullet weights ranging from 110, 150, and 180 grains, it offers great versatility. The 110-grain bullet at a muzzle velocity of 3,380 feet per second is a tremendously fast varmint load; the 150-grain, giving 2,980 feet per second, gives very flat trajectory and long-range killing power for such game as deer and the smaller bear; the 180-grain bullet at 2,710 feet per second will take care of almost any game in North America—and in practice is as useful on white-tail deer as on Alaska brown bear. And for those who need bullet weight for heavier species, there is also a 220-grain bullet, giving an excellent muzzle velocity of 2,410 and a muzzle energy of 2,480 foot pounds.

Tastes vary, and what is one man's joy is another's poison. Nothing less than a careful study of rifles will produce the information upon which a final selection and purchase can satisfactorily be based. The performance characteristics of a gun are important, but cartridges may be even more so. Thus, the speed of the bullet's flight is not always the most significant factor, despite the current mania for ultra-high velocities. The 7-mm. Mauser, for example, has always been underrated in North

America because of its comparatively low velocity (m.v., 2,460 for the 175-grain bullet), but its excellent sectional density (weight in relation to diameter of projectile) gives fine penetration and great killing power. Its low recoil makes it, moreover, one of the most attractive firearms from the point of view of use.

Just as speed is not always the most important factor in a bullet, so also the weight of a bullet is not necessarily a good index of its killing power. The 130-grain bullet in the very high velocity .270 caliber is, comparatively speaking, a light-weight affair. But no one who has seen the destructive power of this projectile in action will doubt its effectiveness on almost any kind of big game on our continent. I hasten to add that, with this load, as with all others, carefully placed shots are desirable, and that I would not recommend it as ideal for moose or Alaska brownies. Also, and admittedly, the velocity of the .270 does have a very great deal to do with the devastation that this small bullet achieves.

Bolt-action rifles of excellent quality at moderate cost are produced in the United States by Winchester (Model 70) and Remington (Models 721 and 722). Others are imported from Belgium, where they are produced by Fabrique Nationale in popular North American calibers, and from Czecho-Slovakia, Germany, and Sweden. Among custom gun makers in the United States, Roy E. Weatherby of South Gate, California, is a noted producer of bolt-action rifles, particularly the line of Weatherby Magnums; and in Oklahoma City the Mashburn Arms Company turns out some of the best custom-made arms produced anywhere, including standard calibers and Mashburn Magnums. Custom gun makers, of whom there are a great many, are producing rifles of excellent quality in the United States, and the costs for their guns are, in many instances, only twenty-five to fifty dollars more than the going rates for factory productions.

For the several generations of hunters brought up on slide-action shotguns, the recent development and issuance of the Remington Model 760 ADL rifle in calibers .30-'06, .300 Savage, and .270 Winchester and .35 Remington, is the answer to a prayer never before fulfilled by any of the slide-actions produced. For

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one thing, the older pump rifles were chambered for "safe" loads of the .30 and .32 caliber varieties, developing relatively low pressures and giving, in consequence, about the same performance as the old reliable .30-30—killing power up to 150–200 yards, and a rapidly falling trajectory thereafter. Now the high-intensity loads of the bolt-action rifle have been adapted to the slide-action, a welcome development for those who would like to combine the advantages of this type of action and the range and killing power of the higher velocity cartridges.

A third group prefers the lever-action, dating from the introduction and further developments upon the Model 94 Winchester in caliber .30-30. For them there are a number of excellent lever-actions, ranging from the Savage Model 99 in caliber .250-3000, not the best gun even for deer, except in the hands of an expert, and .300 Savage, which is quite suitable for deer and all-round big game hunting; the Winchester Model 94 Carbine, chambered for .25-35, .30-30, and .32 Special cartridges; Winchester Model 64; and the Winchester Model 71, chambered for the hard-socking Winchester .348 cartridge. Marlin makes a good lever-action, side-gate loading rifle, Model 336 (also available in carbine model), chambered for .30-30, .32 Winchester Special, and .35 Remington calibers.

With the exception of the Remington slide-action Model 760 and the Savage Model 99 in .300 Savage, none of these slide and lever actions is of the long-range variety, nor characterized by the closest accuracy. But I would place the 760 in the same category with a well-made bolt-action in the same caliber, say .30-'06. It was designed for faster action at equally great ranges. The other rifles and carbines in lever and slide action categories find their best uses in heavy timber, shooting at ranges up to 150 or 200 yards, where they are excellent. Across canyons and on mountain slopes, they had better give way to the better calibers, ballistically speaking, in actions which can give real accuracy.

How many times I have been asked which rifle is my favorite, I wouldn't like to count. I have one answer good for all times, however, "The one I'm carrying when I hunt." I've used them all, including the outdated, outmoded rifles of another century,

and I've found each useful for the purposes for which it was intended. But if I were asked what I should buy, I would place the possibles in this order: 7-mm. Mauser, .270 Winchester (the name here designates the cartridge, not necessarily the gun, which could be a Winchester Model 70, a Remington Model 721, an F. N. Mauser, or custom-made gun in this caliber), .300 Savage, .303 British (there's a reason for this, I live in Canada), and the bolt-action .30-'06. I also like the new Remington 760 ADL in .270 simply because I like slide actions—the fastest manually operated injection and ejection system, with the least disruption of sighting. Moreover this type of gun carries no protruberances to catch in things when the gun is contained in a saddle holster.

My predilection for the 7-mm. Mauser must be understood in terms of the number of large, hard-to-kill animals I have encountered during my hunts in the Canadian Northwest—most of them at reasonably close range. The penetration afforded by the long bullet of moderate velocity, the light weight of the rifle, and the mild recoil all make this gun highly adaptable to my needs. I would not balk at the flip of a coin, however, to decide between it, the bolt-action .270, and the lever-action .300 Savage.

There is hardly a rifle for big game which will not profit from a telescope sight, with the exception of top-ejecting lever-action guns, which will hardly accommodate a telescope. The bolt-actions all produce better results if telescope-sighted, and the shooter, too, gains in confidence and ability from the knowledge that, by this means, the ordinarily wide gap between the accuracy of his gun and his ability to hold true is brought to a very narrow tolerance.

There are exceptions, of course. W. J. Osborne, aged 65, with whom I've frequently hunted mule deer, said to me as we returned to camp at dusk last fall: "I don't think I can see as well as I used to." Then pointing to a knot on a tree about a hundred yards away in the gathering gloom, he said, "See that knot?" As a matter of fact, I couldn't pick it out until he lined me up with his forefinger. "Yup, I've finally got it." "Well," he remarked

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quizzically, "I can see it just as clear as day out of my left eye, but it gets a little fuzzy out of my right."

A man like Jeff Osborne doesn't need a telescope but many men do. They have a wide area of choice in 2½-, 4-, and even 6-power tubes, made by excellent organizations in North America like Lyman, Weaver, Stith, Bausch and Lomb, Unertl, and others. There are, in addition to the magnifications given above, variable-power scopes which can be adjusted in ranges from 2½- to 5-power. As for reticles, or the means of sighting within the scope, I am personally very fond of the Lee Dot, centered on two infinitely fine crosshairs, which, when held on the target, affords about as accurate a sighting scheme as modern man could want. This I have proved to my own satisfaction with a K2.5 detachable mounted scope fitted by Weaver to my Ross .303 British rifle, which has given me no misses.

Cartridges for the rifle, it may be gathered from statements made earlier in this section, are a department in themselves. I have never been so shocked in my life as I was when I saw an animal founder from the shock of a bullet, then watched it struggle bravely to its feet and head away from me. I think I became a hunter after my first animal did just that in three feet of snow and a raging blizzard on a mountain top. I came in late that freezing night, after six hours of brutal tracking, with a two-point buck dragging behind me, because I was afraid to leave the buck and its warmth in the pit of the night. The search parties were already spreading out across the snow of the mountain valley, their lanterns blinking and bobbing. The sight of them warmed my heart, but I could hardly say that the searchers were glad. That night I did a lot of thinking as I lay stiffly in my bunk. I had been too anxious about that shot, and not *sure*. I made my resolve then, and I've tried to keep it.

Well-placed shots using proper ammunition are the first obligation of the hunter to his game. It is not enough to bring the animal down; he must be killed as quickly and as painlessly as possible. In the hands of a crack shot, a rifle shooting almost any kind of projectile that will penetrate the rib cage is enough, but in the hands of most of us a rifle needs the best expanding

bullets now made for big-game purposes. This means, in high-velocity, bolt-action arms, Spitzer or pointed-tip bullets, either thin-cased at the point (as in the Winchester-Western Silvertip) or with the lead core exposed (as in Peters Pointed Soft Point). In the lower velocity rifles, throwing heavier bullets, it means round-nosed affairs, thin-cased at the end or exposed.

The purpose in either case is proper penetration of the vital area and the delivery of all, or practically all, of the bullet's energy in the region of the heart and lungs, through mushrooming. This kind of construction is good, too, for the smashing neck shot, which produces an almost instantaneous kill. To Remington, Peters, Winchester, and Western, the leading manufacturers of sporting ammunition in the United States, goes great credit for the design and engineering developments which have so greatly improved cartridges in recent years. Today it can be said with a great deal of truth that the modern rifle is more accurate than the man who holds it, and the ammunition it shoots is better than the ability of the shooter to place it.

### SHOTGUNS

While most of the talk in the rifle department runs to precision, the truth about shotguns is of another order. Here fast reflexes, the quick co-ordination of hand and eye, the feel of the gun, and that indefinable something which produces satisfying results incapable of analysis—in shotguns intangibles prevail. A shotgun is consequently a highly personal possession. The right gun can be only that gun which satisfies you. Once you've found it, care for it and keep it with you.

Which reminds me of a saying of my father's: "A gun, a horse, or a woman should never be entrusted to the care of another man."

Fortunately, there is a shotgun type for almost every broad category of personal taste. We have the traditional double-barreled gun with tubes side by side. An interesting and highly useful variant on this pattern is the over-and-under double, with barrels superposed. Then there is the slide-action gun of which



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the Winchester '97 is the grandfather (and what a grand gun it was and is). Finally, there is the autoloading gun, once a heavy, noisy operating affair, now a thing of grace, light weight, and smooth perfection. This closes the useful repeater categories. Beyond them—rather, below them—lie the single-shots upon which most boys cut their sporting teeth. As I grow older and my reflexes slow up, I sometimes think that a single-shot would be enough for me, too. As for the bolt-action shotguns, I think the least said the better, just as if they did not exist!

Each one of these types of shotgun has its special merit, and I wouldn't recommend one over the other, particularly because "feel" here is everything. Before the era of the repeating shotgun proper, as represented by slide and auto-action arms, the double gun with side-by-side alignment was the sporting piece *par excellence*. It still retains much of its popularity, and I myself use it perhaps more than any other kind. Well made in 12-, 16-, or 20-gauge, it is a thing of beauty, notably in Winchester Model 21 and the L. C. Smith models with hand-filling beaver-tail forends, and it delivers two shots faster than is possible by any other means. This remains true of the double rifle as well as of the double shotgun, but the former is only of academic interest in North America: its real utility is in Africa and India against very heavy game. The double shotgun, moreover, affords a second shot advantage which can be had with no other type of scattergun—it provides a second type of choke for the bird missed with the first barrel and which is now going away at a distance requiring a closer shot pattern.

Stevens makes a serviceable double at a price almost anyone can afford—less than \$65, in fact. Then L. C. Smith in the Field Grade is an excellent and a quite moderately priced gun, now made difficult to obtain by the absorption of L. C. Smith by another firm and the discontinuance of the line. The Winchester Model 21 is expensive but a lifetime acquisition, and it represents unsurpassed craftsmanship in today's gun market. Fox, Lefever, and Ithaca doubles (the latter two no longer made), moderate in price, have been long-time favorites with North American hunters. The Parker doubles, probably the high point

of American shotgun manufacture, but not produced for many years, are still much sought after in the used gun markets.

All of the advantages of the double gun can be had in the over-and-under version, which gives an additional advantage in the single sighting plane. Although the presently available models are handsomely made, they are not as graceful in line as the traditional side-by-side shotgun, largely because of the depth of frame. But this is a minor matter compared to the very real gain in single alignment on the target made possible with this type of arm. The Marlin over-and-under can be had for a quite easy figure. The Browning Superposed is distinctly expensive but a magnificent piece, and like the Winchester Model 21 is a lifetime gun.

Belgian, French, German, and English makes of both side-by-side and superposed shotguns are well known on this side of the Atlantic, and they have been available in the order given with respect to price—that is, in ascending scale, with a very sharp upturn when the price scale reaches the English makes. The latter are distinctly the finest doubles available in the world today, but most of them need be approached only by men with fat bankrolls

Pump or slide-action and autoloading shotguns are America's great contribution to the mass production of sporting guns, and they have placed field shooting distinctly within the reach of hunters from the lowest income bracket to the highest. I am not going into detail about them, nor is it necessary to list all of the makes and price ranges. Every sports shop carries them, and they are distinctly good from every point of view. They are now light, swift in action, easy to operate, excellent from the point of view of sighting—in fact, you pay your money and take your choice. Most of them are, under various laws from Canada to Mexico, required to carry no more than three shells, even though many are produced at the factory to accommodate as many as five. These regulations apply for the most part to migratory waterfowl (for which the repeating shotgun is probably the most satisfactory of the lot), rather than to upland birds.

I like the slide-action shotgun for a variety of reasons. It is

## *Equipment and Methods*

fast enough for all practical purposes. It allows most hunters all the chances they need on either waterfowl or upland birds. And, finally, like the autoloading gun, it can be fitted with a variable-choke device which makes it as adaptable to ducks and geese as to bobwhite quail. For the man with swift reflexes, it is a real game-getter.

A few years ago I was hunting bobwhites with Joe Shelton, who was shooting a well-worn Winchester slide-action '97, 12-gauge. We were hunting over a big Canadian pointer I had brought south for the quail season. He went into a hard point on a steep, grassy hillside, and as Joe moved in, the birds burst from cover as only bobwhites can. The shooting, as it turned out, was to Joe's gun, not mine, so I simply stood and stared. From that covey rise, he brought down in four separate shots four birds. I had never before seen the equal of it, and I don't expect to see it again in my lifetime, unless it should be with Joe pulling the slide-action.

An easy way to get an argument is to talk about suitable gauges in shotguns and the loads that go with them. I'll take care of the first matter by saying that the 12-gauge is a handy gun to carry because you can get shells for it almost anywhere from a Guatemalan country store to James Bay, and even farther north. It has the best range and the most effective pattern in most loads. But . . . I sometimes shoot a 16-gauge, and many of my best friends use the 20-gauge with excellent results. No one of my acquaintance does much with either the 28-gauge or the .410, both of which, in my opinion, are not suitable for the proper killing of anything but very small feathered game, such as snipe, woodcock, etc.

I like 2's and 4's for geese, and 6's for ducks. In the field, I'd use 7½ size shot for doves and pigeons, 8's for quail, 9's (the now standard skeet loads) for woodcock. What goes for doves goes also for ruffed grouse. Wars have been fought over proper pellets for pheasants, birds which, as anyone knows who has spent any time hunting them, are very hard to kill. Use 7's if you want; I use no smaller shot than No. 6's, and most of the time larger sizes. Now that the debate has been well started, you can de-

fend—or fend for—yourself. You'll likely be doing that the rest of your happy hunting days anyway.

For double-barreled guns, the question of amount of choke or constriction at muzzle is still open; for the repeaters, it is no longer a problem, now that a number of very satisfactory variable-choke devices are available. For upland game, I like right barrel (or lower in the superposed) improved cylinder, and left (or upper in superposed) modified choke. For ducks and geese, right modified choke and left full. For pheasants, ditto. If I were being honest about doves and pigeons, I'd say quite frankly that they need the same pattern of shot that ducks get—and at just as long ranges.

The modern shotgun is still a hefty kicker, cured in part by a good quality recoil pad. But if the recoil pad took away all of the unpleasant jar, I would still insist that ordinary loads are sufficient for everything from quail to pheasants, but excluding such waterfowl as ducks and geese. For the latter the superloads ( $3\frac{3}{4}$  drams of powder instead of  $3\frac{1}{4}$ , for example, in the 12-gauge) are not only preferable but necessary. There are people who go into the field with heavy loads. As a rule they are not up to par on flying game, for the reason that they flinch from recoil without recoil pads or involuntarily shudder from muzzle blast with them. Waterfowling changes the conditions and reduces the unpleasant aspects of oversize loads, because shots are, on average, less frequent and more deliberate.

It is upon the gun that all modern hunting is based, but there are accoutrements that can add a great deal to one's safety and comfort. A small but accurate compass and a knife of good design are absolutely essential. With these, a gun, and ammunition, a man could, even today, start into the wilderness on a journey of hundreds of miles with the prospect of living through a winter. For purposes of a successful and comfortable sojourn in the woods, however, I think the following list (over and above rifle, shotgun, compass, and knife) is what every hunter should try to accumulate: a sleeping bag, a nest of pots, a cup, plate,

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fork, spoon, a water-tight match container, a small hatchet, a rifle sling, a pull-through for cleaning rifle and shotgun, a knapsack, a camera, a rifle telescope or binoculars, a rainproof jacket, comfortable, water-resistant shoes, heavy underwear, half a dozen pairs of sox, a flashlight or candles, and a sense of humor for times when the going is rough. But now that we have given some thought to guns and what goes with them, let's look at these other items, taking the compass first.

### THE COMPASS

Any compass as a companion in the woods is better than none. *Trust it, use it, always take it with you*, even if you forget your gun. No man has a "sense of direction," although many claim to have. I'll make a hundred dollar offer to any man who can be put in a completely dark room, on a smooth floor, blindfolded, who can be turned around ten times, and, in ten trials, nine times point out any direction asked for.

I once went into a small forest with a hunter who claimed absolute sense of direction. I believed him. I knew from observation how to get back to my launch, but he said we should go the other way. I followed him for a full hour, only to have him lead me right back between the two trees we had started out from. Our cigarette package and butts were still on the log, just beyond the trees. He lost a little faith in himself and now carries a compass, which he swears is better than any other made. I have been lost many times, completely lost, within fifteen minutes of camp, and have taken three quarters of an hour to get back in clear weather. Yet, I am often the one who has to lead a stray in, and I have travelled for days in the bush to come out within a quarter of a mile of where I wanted, without following any trail.

I say *trust your compass*, because it is always *more* nearly correct than you are. Once when hunting in December, in the Caribou, with a forest ranger, I saw a tragedy developing. We got caught in a blizzard at eight thousand feet between two ranges of mountains, on foot in waist-deep snow, with darkness approaching. I knew we were lost, and pulled out my compass.

The ranger said "Hell, you don't need that thing. Fir doesn't grow on the north side of a ridge. We just go that way."

I pulled out my compass again, and pointed to the other direction. He took out his compass and looked at it.

"Hell," he said, "this rock around here must be magnetic! Fir just doesn't grow on the north side of a ridge. Our compasses just aren't right. I'll lead us out."

I started to argue but felt that a forest ranger who spends most of his life in the bush should know where he was going. It seemed logical that there might be magnetic rocks around. I followed him for about half an hour, checking my compass occasionally. Finally I saw we were going into another basin that I believed might lead to our being at least a night out, if a worse fate didn't overtake us and we were frozen to death. I called attention to my compass and he checked it with his. He used the same explanation, of magnetic rocks and fir trees.

I told him he could go his way, I'd try mine, but as I finished speaking I noticed that he went over and relieved himself by a log. It was the third time in fifteen minutes that I had seen him do this, as well as relieve his bowels. It is a sure sign that a man is lost when he acts thus, so I insisted upon going *with* our compasses, *not against them*. We got out in two hours.

Even the cheapest compass (sometimes embodied in a knife or other piece of hunting equipment as an accessory) is better than none. The use of a compass is simple. If you think the boys will razz you about using it, take it out as soon as you get a short distance from camp. Level it on a log, and by the highest object or ridge discernible, locate the direction of the point to which you think you will go. If it is indicated as southwest of camp, your return course is in the opposite direction, that is, northeast. Repeat that in your mind several times, and *don't forget it*. If you go past the original point, set another course *and adhere to it*. If you make several course changes, write them down in case you don't trust your memory. There are other more mathematical equations, but these I have given will be sufficient—if you *adhere to them*.

If you lose your compass, remember that the sun is in the

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east in the morning, south in the noon hour, west in the evening, if you are in the northern hemisphere. In snow, rain, fog, or mist remember that the heavier growths of moss are found on the north side of the trees, because of reduced light exposure. I usually follow a waterway, no matter how small, either down or up, when I am temporarily lost. It will lead me either to an identifiable swamp, stream, or lake, or to the highest ridge where I can look out over the country. Don't just wander around trying to find a way out. *Get a purpose and stick to it*, and try to avoid being scared. There aren't any more wild animals in the woods at night than there are in the day, and they won't molest you any more one time than another.

I know one hunter who swears he has never been lost at any time. There are other reasons for which his word may be doubted, but I feel that he is like the Indian in the following illustrative story. A hunter, fairly new to the woods, noticed that his Indian guide seemed to be changing course often without any apparent reason. Finally he became worried about their wanderings, as night was closing in. It occurred to him that, in fact, they were lost. He turned to the Indian and asked:

"Are we lost?"

The Indian ignored him and kept changing course.

Finally the hunter caught up with him and grabbed his coat in a fit of desperation at their obvious plight. He again asked querulously, "Are you sure we aren't lost?"

The Indian looked at him with a profound expression on his face. Finally he said, "Nope. We not lost. Camp lost."

Despite your reliance on your compass, always stop occasionally and survey the country behind you. It will look entirely different than it did when you approached it. Watch for unusual snags, outcroppings of rocks, cliffs, streams, and types of growth, and remember them for the return journey—watch for them on the way home. They will guide you. Remember one thing above all others. *You don't know any direction except up and down, but your compass does. Use it!*

### HUNTING KNIVES

There are many knives for hunting, some good, some absolutely useless. A hunting knife should be big and heavy, for it will be used for everything from cutting bread and kindling to skinning game and whittling your name on the campside tree. I say heavy, because it should be strong enough to be pounded through the bones of a big animal, particularly the sternum or breastbone. A good knife is the most useful thing in camp. (Sometime when you are out, watch to see what implement you use most.) The blade should not be less than four inches long and one and a quarter inches wide. The curve should be the full width of the blade at least, starting about two inches from the tip. This curve is for skinning. Don't buy a dagger type of two-edged blade or one with a slender point.

If the sheath has a snap-type loop to hold the knife in, take it off, or convert it to a buckle arrangement. If you remove it, put a good rawhide thong in its place, and tie it securely when you aren't using the blade.

Leather-handled knives are best inasmuch as they don't slip easily when covered with blood, and they don't reflect light. Avoid any of the brightly ringed, metal-sectioned knives for the same reason. Let your knife get a good dull color, and, except for the blade, don't polish it or shine it at all.

I have had many hunting knives, but recently bought one of the Army surplus commando knives, using it on my last hunting trip. I can't praise it too highly. The man who designed that knife did a real job. It is a lousy looking thing, but after a couple of weeks it began to look better for hand polishing.

Clasp knives are good, but they should have an anticlosing device and be attached to a thong so they will not be jarred out of the pocket when the hunter is falling, sliding, or climbing.

One of the neatest outfits I ever saw, and would like very much after seeing it in use, is a combined small hatchet and hunting knife, using an interchangeable handle.

Carry a small stone in your kit and keep your knife sharp at all times.



### SLEEPING BAGS

A good light sleeping bag means the difference between a pleasant hunting trip and one marred by sleepless nights. It should be accompanied by a waterproof ground sheet (a sheet of plastic film will do), for obvious reasons. The better bags cost the most money and are worth it. They are lighter by bulk because they are filled with down, not feathers, kapok, wool, or cotton. Down is warmer and will not pack or crowd into sections, thus leaving patches almost bare of heat-retaining insulation. Buy a good bag even if you have to do it on time.

I have an old eider bag in which I have slept outside in the month of November on the snow near Prince George, British Columbia, and also during cold nights on the Texas high plains. It seems a wonderful investment when I think of the dozens of fellows I have seen shivering through nights in blankets and cheap bags.

Unless it is wet outside, always hang your sleeping bag out each day, *having first turned it inside out*. When you put it down again, fluff it up by pulling the lining and covering apart from each other. You can control heat retention by opening the sides on mild nights or by zipping them up when the weather is chill. Bags with a head cover are the most comfortable, but your wife can add this feature easily if the bag you buy does not have it.

When you put the sleeping bag away, spray it with DDT or put some mothballs near it, not in it, or, better still, wrap it tightly in a cotton cloth or pack it securely in its own container.

### COOKING UTENSILS

In a superb book on the American West of the period of the mountain man in the 1830's entitled *The West of Alfred Jacob Miller* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), Marvin C. Ross has reproduced two hundred of Miller's watercolors of life in the wilderness, circa 1837. Save for Indian pots and sheath and skinning knives, I can't recall a scene in which cooking

utensils and tableware figure. Hump ribs were roasted on stout pegs near a bed of coals, and when done they were devoured by men who used only knives for the task. But these lads were resourceful and skilled in outdoor living (they had to be). Most city dwellers who go on a fall hunt or fly fish a mountain stream are better advised to take along a few cooking conveniences.

One of the best of modern conveniences is the compact, lightweight Reynolds aluminum nest of pots and pans, which gives you everything from kettles and frying pans to the ever-necessary coffee pot, four cups and four aluminum plates. It's thick enough to be durable, and it occupies the least possible amount of space.

The heaviest, most unwieldy, and blackest villain of them all is the Dutch oven, which the chuck-wagon cook of the Western cow outfits long ago proved, however, to be the best single aid to cooking. You can do almost anything with it—make a stew, bake bread, pot-roast a hunk of venison, or bake fish. It will do the job on the coals or under them—as, for example, when you wish to leave camp in the morning with the ingredients for a stew buried under live coals and ashes, and expect a meal to be ready for consumption when you return, lugging game and all tuckered out. But a Dutch oven is heavier than sin and is a hellion to keep clean. I take one when I have space and can afford the extra weight. But as every housewife knows, a thin skillet is no good, simply because the light metal won't retain heat. Hence the proven virtues of the Dutch oven, as against its dime-store cousin which looks o. k. but curls even the broth.

#### OTHER GEAR

Binoculars are probably the luxuries of hunting, but they are worth the money spent on them. They will mark game where no human eye can see it. Binoculars are a nuisance if they are too large. Although I don't own a pair, I have used and very heartily recommend the new little miniature prismatic lense glasses. They are the neatest adjunct to hunting made available in a long time, and they don't thwack the chest as the big ones do.

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A camera is another luxury, but pictures of a trip will help you relive the events a thousand times—quite aside from keeping you a little honest about your exploits. I advise a small camera that will hang around your neck under your shirt, and one can be bought for under five bucks.

A knapsack is a must on any trip. The light canvas ones that go over both shoulders and will just about hold a four gallon drum of gasoline are best for me.

The uses of all other things listed needs little explanation. Good woolen underwear and socks give comfort in chill weather, and woolen socks are desirable even in mild weather because they dissipate moisture. Water-repellent boots and a jacket are among the essentials wherever hunting and fishing are carried on. For hunting purposes, I like the oil-tanned variety of cow or moosehide boot, made usually with composition sole, not leather, which slips badly in grass and in the uneven going of hillsides and, moreover, won't turn ground moisture satisfactorily. For really wet going, nothing surpasses the heavy-soled, rubber footed boots with a ten-inch top of leather or rubber. The latter should be bought large, and into them put innersoles and fill the rest up with pure woolen socks.

The U. S. and Canadian armies have taught us about all we need to know about water-repellent jackets. You can run the gamut from zipper-front affairs light enough for a mild afternoon to wool pile and fleece lined garments heavy enough, when worn with a woolen shirt of good weight and quality, to withstand a blizzard. With cartridges carried in a shell belt or pouches, these jackets need no great volume of pocket space, and, in the case of military garments obtained as surplus, do not, in fact, provide the space. Similar garments are made by a large number of clothing manufacturers. From them also are obtainable the down-filled vests and jackets which afford splendid warmth with very little weight. Curiously, these vests and jackets, if left open, are not uncomfortable when the temperature rises from a zipping cold in the morning to something approaching comfort at mid-day, particularly in northern latitudes.

I am completely sold on the army type of woolen pant for

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hunting in the mountains. It is close-woven, warm, durable, and reasonable in weight and bulk. For upland shooting, which is usually done in weather not over-cold, briar-resistant cotton drill is all that is needed.

In the main, North Americans wear entirely too much clothing when they go after big game or game birds. The only exception I would make is in duck and goose hunting, where inactivity makes the best and most plentiful of cover inadequate at times. But in the mountains it is important to gauge your clothing in relation to your activity. If you start from camp in a very cold but bright morning to climb from 500 to 1,000 feet, you need less clothing than the frost around camp suggests. Circulation, once well started after such a climb, will take care of a lot of eventualities, even if you decide to still-hunt when you get "on top." Down in the lowlands, where most of the wing shooting of birds is done, the ceaseless movement of the hunter works up body heat rapidly. Most of the discomfort—and a great deal of resulting fatigue—comes straight from this kind of misjudgment.

Among other necessities for the hunt, a water-tight match container is an absolute must. It can be anything from a screw-top medicine bottle to one of those excellent receptacles with the compass on top. *Never go into the woods without matches*, and never use the matches in the container unless all other supplies run out and you really need a light. A flashlight, or candle, is a necessity in any camp, and you will be a damn nuisance to the rest of the boys if you borrow theirs all the time.

A rifle sling, or a long piece of sash cord or leather thong, can double for a lot of uses besides carrying the gun. It will splint a broken leg, tie up a frayed cinch, hang up an animal, or hold up your pants. No hunter should be without at least one or the other and both will come in handy. I prefer the rifle sling because it alone will serve satisfactorily for regular or hasty-sling steadyng of the rifle when more or less deliberate shots are taken from prone, sitting, or kneeling positions.

#### HUNTING METHODS

It has been my desire to explain the type of hunting best employed for each animal as I tackle various species in succeeding chapters. But I should make a few observations in advance. From my own experience, I have noted a very distinct resemblance between the actions of animals and those of man. If you like the look of a stretch of country for reasons such as lush growth, water, easy access, good cover, a view of surrounding country, and shelter from the elements, it is likely that animals will pick that same spot for a habitat. Your chances of seeing animals and birds will, almost without exception, come in the vicinity of such a countryside. Hunt for such spots, and give them close and quiet approach and scrutiny.

Watch for such signs as fresh browse, fresh dung, and fresh foot prints. Move silently when you find them. The animal may be just around the next bush waiting to identify you before taking flight.

Always move as silently as you can when hunting big game, going from cover to cover. Look behind you and to either side, often and continuously. If you can't move without making noises, remember that the animals can't either. Stop and listen quite often for sounds other than your own. Don't wear or carry shining objects uncovered, and although red is a chosen color I never wear it, but I do advise some bright color. The bloody fool who may shoot at you may also be color blind. If you see a hunter near you, speak to him or whistle part of a tune; don't yell at him. He may have a weak heart or a twitching trigger finger. *Shoot only at animals that you can fully identify, never at sounds or shadows.* A wounded animal can give you a bad time of it, perhaps kill you, while an unhurt one will almost always flee at the terrific detonation of a cartridge.

Tracking game can be learned only by experience in the bush, but there are indications which will give you a fair idea of when the animal was there, and where it went. When you find a track, bend down and examine it very closely. Spiders web a track in a matter of hours. Look to see if there are webs criss-crossing it

If there are, it is likely that a day has elapsed since the animal was there. If the area is shaded, or time is very early morning, there will also be tiny globules of dew or moisture on the webs. That will let you know that at least a day has passed since the animal went by. The presence of dust on the strands of the web in dry country will also indicate age of the track. Very fresh tracks always show sharp contours of the soil in which they are made. Old tracks mellow out according to the soil and weather conditions. If the track is not sharp in contour, it is likely old, unless made in clay or fine mud. Tracks in the latter have been found in sharp condition after many hundreds of years.

If the track was indistinct, look for signs of earth or twigs thrown backward from the sudden forward propulsion of the animal. Follow such sign by taking the direction indicated by the small end of the individual track. It has the appearance of an arrow, sharp-pointed and spreading out at the back end. Circle, if you lose it, and try to pick out the most likely area the animal will have headed for. Remember, a pursued animal always takes to the nearest cover, as does also a wounded one.

If you think you have put an animal up, remain quietly where you are until you either hear something or decide the game has gone completely. Never charge after an animal, because you will only increase its speed of flight if you do. Many animals will stop short, just after the first impulsive bounds, take to very small cover, then turn to watch the thing that has startled them from their natural complacency. There is not ordinary curiosity, as has so many times been mistakenly put down, but a desire to identify the thing that has moved them before they decide on a plan of retreat from the intruder. Animals don't like to leave their normal feeding, grazing, or bedding grounds, and will return to them if unmolested. If you see an animal (with few exceptions, such as moose, caribou, predators, and other wide-ranging species) in a certain spot one day, you can expect to see it in the same spot the following day, at approximately the same time. Sometimes even migratory animals and the wide rangers will for a time remain in the same vicinity. If you don't get a good shot, don't fire or make a fuss. Return

more silently and after more careful planning on the following day or days.

A badly wounded animal will always leave a good blood trail for a short distance. I don't advise sitting and waiting for an animal to stiffen up. I always get on the trail fast for the first ten minutes, then take it slowly, with an occasional ten-minute halt, never longer. The reason for this is that a wounded animal is not only holed by a slug, it is also very badly shaken up with bullet shock and concussion. If it lies down, the hunter won't be able to see it easily; but if the hunter moves constantly on the blood trail, the animal will tire. Also if it lies down it will get the needed chance to recuperate and freshen. If you ever had a deep wound you would know that it did not "stiffen" until the day after you received it.

It is hard to track any game, and wounded game is not much less difficult than live game, perhaps at times more difficult, because unmolested game is sometimes unwary, wounded game never so. Snow is, of course, the ideal tracking condition, and blood shows then very clearly, also the amount of blood loss. Usually the heavy hemorrhage stops in the first half hour, and the only sign will be a yellowish stain washed from the hair, with an occasional pin point of red blood. A badly wounded animal will often leave the marks of its dewclaws back of the prints as the legs weaken. If you see these marks, speed up your tracking—the animal won't be far ahead of you.

After the first excited rush, the game will usually turn downhill and head for a thicket of trees or valley. In tracking wounded game, watch for the sign of blood on bushes and trees. The damage done by your bullet will be shown at its approximate height by the highest spot at which blood has brushed on these objects, and you can tell if there are any broken legs by the absence of one or more prints and the increased depth of the imprints that do show.

Don't rush blindly into any forest cover for any game, be it only a deer. All wounded animals will turn and fight. Circle the area you suspect the animal to be in and listen very carefully for labored breathing. Such respiration is often audible for twenty-

five feet—well within the range of ordinary hearing. Moreover, circling a wounded animal will often cause it to move nervously and expose itself. If you don't think it is dead when you do see it, stand off and watch the chest for rise and fall and the nostrils for dilation. Usually, if it is dead, the legs will be extended to one side as it lies outstretched. If you see a sign of life, drop a bullet in behind the head at the top of the neck. It won't spoil any meat there.

#### CLEANING AND SKINNING

Many men shirk the job of cleaning and skinning animals, some because they don't know how to do it, some because of laziness or nausea. But a man should know how to clean and skin the game he shoots, and he should do it himself.

After downing an animal, many men religiously cut its throat to bleed it. This seems to me without point, particularly when chest-cavity shots are involved. In most such cases, the animal has already been pre-bled by the wound in the region of heaviest concentration of blood vessels. Cutting the throat is therefore entirely unnecessary. In many other body shots, the severance of an artery takes place and is the immediate cause of death. The bleeding may be internal or external. However, after an animal is down for keeps, don't waste any time in getting at the gutting of it.

Actually there is nothing difficult about this procedure. Grab a hank of hair at the meeting of the ribs and the soft belly, pull up hard, and split the skin with the edge of the blade, *not the point!* Watch for the separation of skin from flesh, then go gently through the flesh to the watery looking stomach membranes. The reason for not using a knife point is that the sharp tip may puncture the internal organs and spill dung all over the cavity and yourself, once you enter the abdominal cavity. Split the animal to the testes, where the solid meat begins at the pelvic bone, then carefully ease out the large intestine. Reach back and cut the long gut to the rectum, pinching it closed as you do, then pull out everything that will come clear of the cavity. With this



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done you will have room to work and cut the liver off the backbone. Split the diaphragm between chest and intestines, then cut the heart and lungs free from where they hang to the backbone. Don't worry about your knife cutting anything it shouldn't. There isn't anything that will be harmed, nor harm your animal if cut after the intestines are removed. It is a tough job for a beginner, not because it is hard to do, but because it is often messy.

I've seen men cut off scent glands, carefully remove testes and penis, and wash out an animal, yet they wouldn't do the most important thing of all, that is, open up the carcass the way they should. Never hesitate to split the brisket or sternum (where the ribs of the lung and heart cavity join) from the throat to the abdomen. In fact I advise always doing this. The more air that gets into the cavity of an animal, the better the chance of getting home some really edible meat. Much of the so-called "gamey" meat is nothing but spoiled meat resulting from improper chest opening. I've learned that the bitter way, after following a procedure taught me by a man who should have known better. He used to cut a small, neat incision and laboriously, methodically pull the innards through it. I used to copy him until I lost a moose by not opening it up sufficiently to allow it to cool overnight. In the morning it was gassed all through the front shoulders and down the spine into the haunches. I was never so ashamed of myself in my life. I have never done it since, and I have not lost any meat, either.

Complete skinning and sectioning is advisable as soon as the animal is downed in warm weather. When this is done, the meat cools quickly to form a "case" or hard skin, which keeps out the blowflies. Don't be too proud to stand by and fan away the wasps and flies with a brush wand until this case has hardened. It will save your meat. In cold weather it does not matter so much about sectioning, but you must clean out the body cavity of its organs and blood.

There is no need to remove leg scent glands, despite what you read, because they will not cause meat to spoil. And it is sometimes foolish to remove the reproductive organs, inasmuch

as you may take the animal's head off, if it is poor, and leave it in the bush. In such case, and where male animals alone are allowed to be shot, you will have a bad job convincing a game warden of the sex of your kill. The sex organs don't spoil meat.

When skinning out any animal for a trophy, there are a few things to remember. If it is just the cape you want, and it is impossible to take out the meat, start your cut about three to six inches down the shoulders from where you want your mounted head to come. This procedure gives the taxidermist plenty of hide to work with. The cape is skinned off in the same manner that the whole hide is removed, except that you disjoint the head at the last (uppermost) vertebra. When taking the whole hide, cut as straight a line as you can down the inside of the back legs, disjoint the legs at either the feet or the dewclaws, then work the skin backward over the rump towards the head. If you can hang the animal, the task is made just that much easier. Hanging can be accomplished more easily by putting a stout stick between the hamstrings and bone of the back legs, then tying the rope to this hanger, to hoist the animal up. With large animals this is out of the question, and hide removal is better accomplished by sectioning off the quarters, then skinning.

The use of the knife is not hard to master. To skin an animal, use a sharp knife and keep it pressed against the skin, not free on the membranes. If the blade is kept against the skin itself, the meat will not be cut and allowed to form red patches on the skin. If you do allow meat and fat to adhere to the skin, scrape it off at the first opportunity, because it will spoil quickly and the fur will be caused to "slip" or come out. If you are having a hard job cutting the small bones of an animal don't hesitate to pound your knife through with a wooden club, but never use a rock or metal. To disjoint legs, bend them back and forth, then cut the heavy cartilages as they come into view.

Skinning out a head is a tough job because it involves a small area and requires painstaking attention. It should be done as soon as possible in order better to preserve the head for mounting. Just do it the same way you skin out the main hide, rolling it

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back from the base of the neck to the lips. The incision required for removal of hide from the head should be at top of neck, not the bottom. When the hide is free, take out the eyes and tongue, then go up through the base of the cranium, where the last neck vertebra joins the head, and through the roof of the mouth. Clean out the skull as well as you can, then turn the capeskin inside out and hang it up to dry.

As for butchering the meat, you can't go far wrong here, but after many times at the meat block myself, I find it is very cheap to have the job done by a regular butcher or cutter in the cold-storage lockers where the meat is to be stored. You can't spoil the meat by amateur butchering, but you can spoil the cuts.

Always let a hide get as much air as you can bring to it. Never roll it and toss it carelessly in a corner. Hang it, if you can, and dry it. Salt it, if you wish, with any salt you may have around, and put plenty on it. Salt will help to cure the skin to some extent.

Look after your own animal as much as you can, and don't expect others to pack and work your kill unless you plan to give them a good share of the meat.



PART I

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# *Game Animals*



## GAME ANIMALS

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### 1 : *Deer*



ACTUALLY, there are several types of animals that belong to the family of *Cervidae*, or deer, including moose, elk, and caribou, but the deer to be discussed here are the whitetail, blacktail, and mule deer, which I am designating as big-game rather than small-game animals. I have examined these deer from Alaska to lower Mexico. There are many variations of each type, from the big fawn-colored mule deer of the northern forests, which goes to three hundred pounds, to the tiny seventy-five pound buck of the Guerrero Mountains in southwestern Mexico.

For a hunter who loves to hunt, I'd say the deer has been responsible for more exciting and pleasure-filled hours than any other animal on earth. At the same time, few men look down on the graceful carcass of a deer just felled without a feeling akin to shame or regret. Such is the mixed savour of deer hunting. A naturally timid animal, the deer can be wary, curious, clever, or outright brave and foolhardy. I have killed a three-point buck as close as six feet, but not without having to shoo two does away to get my shot into the male animal. I've seen deer in the same territory that a man couldn't approach within five hundred yards. It is hard to say what made the difference in their actions. Perhaps the ladies had something to do with it, perhaps some of the unafraid animals had not been hunted before.

It was north of Campbell River in British Columbia prior to

the opening of a new road through that territory. One frosty morning the forestry superintendent took us out to view a herd that collected each night in a small valley. I counted twenty-six within view, but the forester told us there had been a count of forty-four made before the opening of the hunting season. Three of us took five deer out of that area. One that I took weighed 185 pounds with the head off and the carcass dressed out. It was the biggest coast deer (blacktail) I have ever seen, and was the largest killed that year on Vancouver Island. Two of the other deer we shot weighed over 140 pounds, but they were also big blacktails. I asked Game Department officials if they did not seem to be big deer, to which they agreed, explaining that the blacktail, or coast deer, were the same deer as the mule deer of the interior of British Columbia, but that different environments had bred different types. For myself, I put the varying size of coast deer (from 90 pounds to about 225) to the effect the logging off of timber has had on the animals. With the cutting of forests, the land is opened up to growth of more and better browse. Not fifty miles away, on Texada Island, one of the coastal group, the deer are jocularly known as "jack rabbits." Deer on this island, which is a relatively small bit of land, do not have good range upon which to feed, and a full-grown buck will often weigh not more than sixty pounds. Inbreeding probably does have its effect also. Whereas on Vancouver Island, which is three hundred miles long, certain experimental breeds have been introduced, such as the well-known Scottish red deer, and from the ensuing crossing of strains in some sections have come the extreme variation in color, weight, and contour noted in many deer. I saw one deer taken near Cowichan Lake that weighed 170 pounds, was about 60 inches from snout to rear, and its legs were not more than 18 inches long. It looked like a razorback hog with horns. I won't try to identify it or account for the cause of its curious appearance.

Blacktail deer can be hunted along the Pacific coastal ranges of the United States, and mule deer are, of course, available over most of western Canada, the western part of the United States from Texas to California, and in both the mountainous and



desert regions of Mexico. The mule deer is, in fact, indigenous to both the highlands and the hot, desert lowlands, but I am not sure the scientists have worked out all of the ramifications of subspecies. In any case, the mule deer is a great prize wherever it is taken, and having hunted it in most of its habitats, I should say that only the whitetail (or Virginia) deer matches it in variety of range. The mule deer has no equal in size among deer proper on our continent, being, on average, much larger than the other species (I exclude, obviously, moose, elk, and caribou).

The buck mule deer produces antlers, the doe none, as in the case of other deer, though a freak doe with horns does show up from time to time. There is a difference between mule deer and the whitetails other than size and coloration and the fact that the mule deer has a round, white, black-tipped tail, whereas the whitetail's is (as described) a brushy affair and white on the underside and much larger. This other, major, difference consists in the character of the antlers, which in the mule deer are dichotomous, or evenly branched, whereas the whitetail's antler points branch from a main beam and the brow tines are quite long.

The subject of color in these animals is an extremely difficult one because, while the general tone is gray, there are variations from dark slate to a reddish hue, depending upon locality. In large males the brisket is black. Size is even more debatable because weights are often estimated rather than verified at the scales. On the western slope of the Rockies in Colorado, where I have hunted a number of times, workers at cold-storage plants, to which most animals are brought for butchering, tell me that mule deer weighing over 260 pounds, field-dressed, are extremely rare. One of my friends brought down a massive buck last fall on which five of us made estimates before running the animal into town for weighing. The estimates varied from 225 to 285 pounds. It actually weighed 240, which, incidentally, is a big mule in anybody's book. From Arizona (and even Mexico) to and including Canada, I should say that a mature, though not necessarily old, buck will run somewhere between 135 and 185 pounds, field dressed, on average.

Antlers in a mature buck will run four points on a side, disregarding brow tines, and up to five or six in older animals. But in animals beyond six years, the antlers tend to grow freakish, sometimes sending out a great number of points and palmating, or flattening at the ends. These bucks are usually not good bets for the food locker, though there are exceptions. Wherever limestone is plentiful that fact is reflected in the antlers of deer, particularly the mule deer. They not only develop great spread (as much as 45 inches) but will be massive in size and weight. Some of the heads taken on the Kaibab Plateau in Arizona in recent years have been almost fantastically large. New Mexico, Utah, Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho have produced their share of good trophies, as have the western provinces of Canada. The desert mules of Arizona are good-sized animals, but those of Mexico will weigh as much as those of the Rockies, and their heads are often as fine as any you will see anywhere.

A mule deer in full flight is a study in motion which seemingly defies the Newtonian laws. All four feet hit the ground, closely bunched, then in a series of steep vertical bounds the animal deals confusion to the hunter and disappears. I have done quite a lot of hunting, but I have never claimed to be a good shot on mule deer in this particular variety of flight. A successful shot at such a time requires reflexes of the highest order. But luckily for hunters like me, mule deer are more often seen in easier motion—browsing or, if frightened or apprehensive, at a slashing trot. The ordinary principles of aimed fire and lead for a moving object will do well enough here. But never make the mistake of holding as if the animal were standing still. At a trot, this big deer moves speedily, and improper lead on it will get you only a shot in the rump or a miss a foot behind the outstretched tail.

The whitetail deer, of which breed I have shot several, is to me the most graceful and the most palatable, also the most uniform in size, seldom weighing over 125 pounds, though a big buck will very occasionally exceed two hundred. Perhaps the easiest way to identify it from the mule deer, or blacktail, is by the very long tail with a flashing white underside. Actually it is much like an antelope. The small rack of horns is usually deli-

cately moulded, with a definite cant toward the front of the head, and the lightly built points have an amber coloration with whitish tips. There is more red in the Virginia or whitetail deer than in the coat of the mule deer.

The whitetail is almost everywhere in the eastern part of the United States, in the eastern and to a considerable extent in the western provinces of Canada, and in Mexico. He is found in the American West, too, in Texas, where the brush hunting after him is one of the world's most difficult but rewarding tasks, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Arizona, New Mexico, and in many of the other western states. The whitetail populations of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Maine are among the largest on the entire continent, considering area, and provide thousands of resident and nonresident sportsmen with grand hunting every fall or winter, depending upon season.

It is curious that the whitetail has not only survived but increased in numbers in many areas where settlement occurred as long as a century ago, and where humans and human habitations and arable practices are very much in evidence. The truth about this grand little animal is that, given half a chance, respected out of season and at fawning time, and kept to optimum numbers in relation to forage, he has the staying powers of the best of our wild species. In the southern states he has held his own where browse is available, and in the swampy and isolated areas his species is often plentiful, occupying the wilderness with the still (thank Heaven) ineradicable black bear.

This is the swift-bounding species that provides the only big-game hunting that thousands of Americans will ever know. This is the source of some of the most delectable meat that our continent affords. This, indeed, is the animal so full of tricks that the legends about him, from colonial times to the present, number into the thousands.

Of hunting deer, I won't offer too many rules, but I do not believe in the use of dogs, nor in driving them with a group of men. If the deer are that scarce they should be left in closed season until they get a chance to multiply.

To come upon a deer by single-handed effort, by climbing

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hills, bluffs, and mountains is one of the greatest thrills of hunting. Seeing an antlered buck slinking off, or standing looking at you with imperious curiosity, is a beautiful sight. To drop a running buck at over one hundred yards is an achievement guaranteed to cheer the heart of any sportsman. I have done all of those things, and often feel guilty I could not share them with other people.

Deer are primarily nocturnal feeders, but I have seen them cropping brush in the middle of a hot September afternoon. Their feed is varied from grass to braken, salal brush, mountain laurel, oak browse, and the soft tips of young fir and pine trees, depending on the time of year the hunter goes after them. If early in the season, before snow, frost, or drought, has spoiled, or covered all the feed, the best time and place to take a deer is close to dawn, just at the edges of the land rising to the hills. My hunting companions and I usually rise about an hour (what a hell of a time to get up it is, too) before the first sign of light, breakfast fairly heavily on pancakes and bacon, and or eggs, swill down a couple of mugs of coffee, stick a haphazard sandwich into our pockets and hike out.

For myself, I prefer to hunt alone, and I usually take a good look at the country the previous day or night. The deer having fed (in the early part of the season) during the night on the lower reaches of grass and shrub browse, will usually be encountered, just as light comes either on the outer fringes of the open country or just rising into the ridges. Actually, whether I make too much noise in the morning or not, I don't know, but I have shot only two deer on level sweeps of ground. Usually, as it gets light I am coming to rising country that leads to the higher timber or brush-covered reaches of the ridges or mountains. A deer is much like a human being. It will seldom take a hard way up a ridge, and unless being chased or frightened, it will go up a well-defined trail, on the easiest access to a higher level. If you take the easiest way you can find up into the timber you will be rewarded by seeing the greatest amount of fresh sign. By "sign" I mean hoof prints, trappings, horn-scratched trees, and dung. The droppings are much like rabbit dung, a little

larger if the animal is large, dark brown and shiny if fresh. The prints are anywhere from an inch and a quarter to three inches in length, and the buck is supposed to have a rounder point on his hooves. I don't know, I never shoot any hoof prints; I usually wait until I see the deer before identifying it.

It is a tough recommendation, but you are more likely to find deer on the ledges high above the feeding area, and *just before you come to the summit*, than down below. In the early morning it is good practice to hunt this area just below the summit, because deer seem to lie up in the pockets, thickets, and hollows of this part of the hills or mountains. Actually, if you analyze it, the reason becomes apparent. The deer feeds during the night. His belly full, he climbs to the security and cover of brush and timber, where he can have hiding easily at hand, the sun to warm him on the ridge, and a far and wide range of vision for enemies. In other words, the deer is always the hunted, never the hunter, so he takes advantage of the terrain to comfort and hide himself. He doesn't choose the extreme summit for this security, due to its exposure to wind and the variation of air currents. On a normal warm day the wind currents run uphill. At night they run down.

From the foregoing it may seem that I think of deer only in terms of ridges. It is not so. I have seen lovely bucks lazing on the gravel beach of a small island dividing the lower reaches of a river. I have seen them standing on the topmost pinnacle of a high mountain, or lying in the deep growth of an alder and willow swamp, but I have killed ten to one on the semi-open patches of the three-quarter mark up the rise to the hill or mountain summit.

In windy, rainy weather deer move about, and you are apt to find them anywhere. Although this is the most disagreeable time to sit and watch a likely territory, I'm inclined to believe that still-hunting is, in fact, the most effective means of taking deer in inclement weather.

In many parts of North America only the buck deer may legally be taken. His habits consequently will be of interest. The male animal is seldom in the advance guard of the group.

He usually hangs a short distance behind the does. Some men say he is wise and cagey and will push the does and younger animals ahead of him, so that they act as an advance guard for him—a sort of expendable patrol. I don't think so, myself. I believe he maintains this rear position because he is guarding the animals from the rear, and he is usually found in this position *after* they are startled, driving the others away from the scent or sound that made them move. If he thinks (and I believe he does), he must do so in terms of smell or crashing sounds coming from behind, in pursuit, not with the idea of pushing the group out into the fire of a rifle.

For this reason it is usually a good idea to stand completely still for some time after seeing does cross an open patch or mountain meadow. The bucks will often follow after. I know one good hunter who always gets his buck, but he can't see horns at more than fifty yards. He never shoots a doe, but he shoots the last single animal to come out of a thicket into the open. He is a good hunter, an old one, and a man of vast experience and bush lore. I don't advise anyone to emulate his method, but tell it only as illustration. Having seen this habit of the bucks and put it to good use in getting my own, I strongly advise you to wait for some time after a couple of does come into sight, and watch carefully.

Methods of hunting deer are all different. One of my friends who won three hunting and fishing trophies in one year is the laziest hunter I ever knew. He goes out early in the morning and does not come back until the last rays of light, and he seldom covers more than a mile or two. I have come upon him sitting patiently on a ridge overlooking a bit of valley as the sun was rising, and I have found him not five hundred yards away from there in the late afternoon. Nothing in that valley could have moved all day without his seeing it. He likes to hunt with a large party of hunters. As he puts it, "Heck, Mike, if I go out alone I have to do all the hunting myself. I like to be fair about it. Share it with the other guy. Let him do the hunting and I do the shooting." There is something in his logic.

Actually, when there are many hunters in a territory, the

least likely way to get shot is to sit perfectly still. But, if many men are hunting, shooting and generally raising a ruckus, the deer are constantly moving away from the sounds. Crossing a quiet valley is all part of their day's journey. If you like to hunt lazily, or are incapacitated in any way, you can enjoy this idyllic lolling in the sunlight and watching the wonders of nature as they unfold before you. I've done it successfully myself, but I'm usually too impatient, and I like to hunt all over God's half acre.

In the later part of the hunting season, when the snow is on the ground, the valley forage is usually gone or covered, and in this kind of weather I have always got my deer in the medium-height ridges and hills, and their feed was usually browse from coniferous trees. Unless there is cattle feed in the fields they seldom come down except to cross a valley on their way to other feed. And this brings to mind what are usually called "cross-overs."

Try as I might I have never yet been able to explain to anyone what a "cross-over" is, except that, figuratively speaking, it is something like a suspension bridge for foot traffic over a canyon. It can be a natural ford in a river, a shallow neck between two lakes, or the natural crossing place between two mountains or mountain ranges. If you look at a piece of country, and the easiest way for you to get from one section of it to another is a natural passage between trees or other physical features, then that certain part of it is likely to be a minor "cross-over." In major cross-overs, the avenue serves as a rule to connect a natural summer range and a natural winter range. All of this explaining is for a definite reason.

You can shoot deer in almost any part of the hunting season on a cross-over, if you are successful in locating it by observation or by questioning others. The reason for this optimistic forecast is that deer are apt to be on the cross-over at any time of the day, in any weather, and the continual influx and exodus together leave a residue of animals that are not shot out completely at any time. From one such point in the Caribou of British Columbia I have personally taken three deer, and been

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instrumental in nine others' being taken. Moreover, I have seen no fewer than thirty deer in it at various times and in different years. Yet it is in a part of the most highly hunted territory in the Caribou. An old Indian showed me the spot. It is the cross-over point for moose and deer from the summer to the winter range, and has been known to the Indians from time immemorial as the "Meat Valley." They hunt it still. I have yet to find a white man in the area who knows of it, and although I have taken friends into the area, I have never told them what it actually is.

With regard to the debatable subject of shooting does, I'm in favor of shooting does for two weeks in any season, or all season if the deer are plentiful. Frankly, I wouldn't shoot a doe myself, because I still think I can get my buck. A doe is usually easy to shoot. She will stand for an interminable time looking at you with only the slightest flick of an ear to take in sounds. A doe has few means of defense and therefore relies on her natural color camouflage, her silent movement, and her ability to back-track to avoid her natural enemies, the wolf and the mountain lion.

A couple of illustrative instances may be of interest. I was about two thousand feet up a logged-off ridge after a bunch of band-tailed pigeons that were feeding in the dogwood trees at the edge of the timber. The day was warm and the ridge faced the sunny side of a lake. I rounded the end of an uprooted stump and not ten feet away from me a sleepy-eyed doe had just got to her feet. I froze immediately, and so did the doe. Leaning against the stump in full view of the animal, I glanced down at my wristwatch. It was twenty after three. I kept my eyes facing the deer. For five minutes there wasn't the slightest trace of movement, at ten minutes the deer's right ear flicked a couple of times, at fifteen minutes there was the tiniest tremor in the front legs and a tiny spidery stream of saliva coming from her muzzle. At twenty minutes the animal had a stream of saliva shining like a glass strand in the sunlight stretching from her lips to a tiny pool on a piece of bark at her feet. The slight tremor in the front legs was more noticeable but there had been no further movement on her part at all, none I can recall on mine except the



movement of my eyes, but I was leaning comfortably against the stump. The doe was standing not more than ten feet away from me in the open.

At a quarter to four, a full twenty-five minutes later, my compassion got the better of me. I motioned slightly with my arm. The doe moved her front feet cautiously, took a slight feinting jump sideways, a full jump ahead, swung on her back feet in a silent pivot, and slipped into the trees so quietly that I never heard a sound from her at any time. My guess is she was waiting for me to spring at her before she moved, and that the saliva was the result of compressed fear.

Another time while hunting blue grouse in the bottom land of an old logging slash, I took the upper edge of the ridge while my two companions took their two dogs and threaded below among the stumps and fallen debris in which willow trees and alders were beginning to sprout. I could look down on them, and ahead of them I saw a doe jump to her feet. Both dogs were out in front and the men were about thirty feet apart. I was amazed to see the doe move aside from one dog that was no more than twenty feet away, toward the other dog, now angling away from her. Then she stood stock still in a bush hardly big enough to cover a jack rabbit. One of the men passed the deer within six feet and did not see her. The other crossed less than fifteen feet away, from which point she was in full open view to him. The deer followed in the rear of the men and dogs for about one hundred yards, then darted off toward a heavy bit of brush. Neither of my companions (they were both very good hunters) would believe me when I kidded them about themselves and their dogs. Actually, I wonder how many deer have done the same thing to me.

But, of shooting does. If bucks alone are shot and killed continuously the natural result is that many does go unbred, which, I'm told, is not good for them nor productive of future deer crops. At any rate, if a doe is left unbred a season, she still eats as much as a fertile doe, and the country is cropped off by animals that are not open to the sportsman. If a satisfactory balance is kept between animals, the resultant breeding is kept at a good

level. If all the bucks are killed off, and no does killed, they can't avoid this unbalance in mating.

Men often kill the illegal does and leave them in the woods because of shame or fear. There is one stock-in-trade explanation. "I could have sworn I saw horns on that animal." Yes. If you look long enough at a doe *you will put horns on her*, and you will kill her. But many men, if they were allowed at the first of the season to take one doe tag, or had another choice of, say, two to three buck tags, would shoot their doe when they saw her and keep their self-respect as sportsmen. Or, if they had to put all their buck tags into one doe, they would hesitate to take a doe in the hope that she did have horns. Besides, a doe, I'm told, is much better eating than a buck, and none of us likes to go season after season without shooting a buck.

But the best of logic consists in the biological knowledge that many areas are admittedly overpopulated with deer, and that the only way to keep the population at an optimum level is to reduce the numbers of both sexes. This flows from the fact that a single buck is able to serve a large number of does. It is closely tied to the fact also that what game management officials are after is a high percentage of kills in relation to the licenses issued. It's the deer population that they have to keep in balance with available browse, not the number of either bucks or does.

Recent tabulations show very clearly that the deer populations of most states and provinces are, according to the game management spokesmen who are responsible for their welfare, too great for the resources upon which they are expected to live. Some of the most heavily populated states, from the point of view of human habitation, are also the densest in deer population. Whitetails are involved here, rarely mule deer. The former thrive under proper management, and when hunting pressure is held to a desirable level, as in Pennsylvania, no threat is posed to their continued existence. I know, on the other hand, that in many areas of Mexico the year-round pressure of the deer slaughter, on both whitetails and mule deer, is such as to pose a genuine problem, both humane and economic. Proper regulations, properly enforced, are the only answer. I might add that there are

areas in certain states in the Southwest where poaching is as bad as in isolated districts of some Mexican states.

The sporting rifles available for deer hunting are numerous and adequate. For coast blacktails and for whitetails everywhere, you can run up and down the scale from the old, now rather slow, .32-20, through the Savage .250-3000, the .257 Roberts, the .30-30 Winchester, the .303 Savage (not to be confused with the .303 British), the 7-mm. Mauser, the .270 Winchester, the .30-'06 (using preferably the 150-grain bullet), and the .300 Savage. There are others, but these are the principal loads for an essentially small, thin-skinned animal. The .30-30 and the 7-mm. Mauser are my choices, with or without scope.

For the mule deer, you can use any in the foregoing list, but with more emphasis on bullet weight and power (also range), possibly jumping over the .25 calibers and adding to the list .303 British. Mule deer are western animals, usually taken at considerable distances—often well over 150 yards. They require a flat-trajectory gun with a nice balance of speed and bullet weight.

That they will sometimes take a lot of bullet is attested by the experience of one of my friends lately. He put a 180-grain bullet in .30-'06 just behind the shoulder of a very large buck. The bullet broke a rib (one of the largest, heaviest bones of its kind I've ever seen in a deer carcass), fragmented, and sent three slivers of metal through the deer's heart. Two shots and five hundred yards later, my friend finally had his trophy.

Here, I think the .270 in 130-grain, the 7-mm. Mauser in 145-grain (unfortunately a custom load, since factories are offering only the 175-grain bullet), and the .30-'06 in 150-grain have the nod. Any rifle using these loads will be better for having a good telescope sight of 2½- to 4-power installed for such hunting.



## GAME ANIMALS

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### 2 : *Black and Brown Bears*

WHEN A BEAR ambles out of a bit of brush with that cock-eyed walk of his like a punch-drunk fighter slamming suddenly out of the doors of a saloon, he gives you the same feeling the fighter does, magnified about a thousand times. You don't know what he is going to do by the look in his eye. He may make you laugh until your sides are sore, or he may cause you a lot of trouble, and it doesn't make any difference if he is a black bear, brown bear, or grizzly.

As a boy I had for a short time a brown bear for a pet, as agreeable an animal as could be found, yet ordinarily he is rated the mean fellow of the woods. On the other hand, I put my first slug into his reputedly timid cousin, in this instance an angry black bear, at a distance of six feet while he was in full charge at me. Yet another black bear came upon my front veranda after my sleeping baby daughter. I killed both animals in the presence of witnesses, or I'd hate to try to tell anyone the incidents were so.

But, of the hunting of bears there are other things to be known, most important among them being where bears can be found. The family *Ursidae*, as biologists call them, are of the Northern Hemisphere, and you might find their kind anywhere (including your front veranda), but for blacks and small brown bears (the latter a phase of the former) the most likely places are on the streams when the salmon are running, in the blue-

berries and on meadows of lush growth, abandoned orchards, or any heavy berry growth when the crop is in season. The grizzly is more consistent in his habits, and actually more easily hunted, when away from the coastal salmon runs. Most true grizzlies live around and on the big snow slides, such as occur in the higher ranges of mountains, as in the Rockies. Canada and Alaska are now their principal habitats, for they are all but extinct in the United States.

Considering the animals separately will make it easier to describe their habits and habitats.

A man can spend two weeks each hunting season in the woods for twenty years and yet never see a bear. Black bears are said to be notoriously timid about the approach of a man, and I'll have to admit that nine out of ten I have seen have been hightailing for parts undisclosed. But one attacked me without provocation. Hunting close to Campbell River, a stream typical in the Pacific Northwest from Oregon to Alaska, I was carrying a small .32-20 caliber rifle in search of blacktail, or coast deer. I had been delegated to the swampy delta, as three of us had decided to hunt a small territory co-operatively before going on to hunt alone. Travelling a few hundred yards apart, one man was atop the ridge, one man in the center, and I was in dog position, on the delta. Having drawn the short straw, I was ambling noisily through the alder thickets, yiping occasionally like a dog (and cursing under my breath), noticing the hundreds of salmon carcasses in various stages of decay and partially devoured, strewn on the low-lying banks. There was a myriad of cross-hatched prints in every muddy hollow, mink, marten, heron, civet cat, deer, otter, bear, and many other lovers of dead salmon flesh.

After about a quarter of mile I came to where the river cut a rising hill and had carved itself out a canyon. It meant I had to start rising on the ridge. Seeking a way up, I saw a tunnel-like game passage under some very tightly grown second-growth hemlock. I crawled on my hands and knees up the passage for about twenty feet, then came to an open, grassy glade about twenty-five feet across which was tightly hemmed on all sides

by the hemlock saplings. A cigarette seemed in order, so I settled down, noticing the number of almost wholly devoured salmon carcasses strewn about the enclosure. A moment later I heard one of my companions coming through the timber above. I called out to him. He asked me where I was. I explained that I was in a sort of enclosure. He said he would come in, and took a few minutes to find a passage. He emerged from the top side through a bushy tunnel with the comment, "Nice and cozy," and settled down to a smoke.

I watched his eyes cover the enclosure with a suspicious glance.

"Say! It looks like something was using this as a sort of open air den," he said finally.

"Yeh," I agreed, "It looks like a bear had been denning up in here with her cubs all summer. Must have brought those salmon carcasses up from the river for the young ones to feed on."

I leaned over and pulled a few strands of black hair from a hemlock sapling which had been bitten off at a bear's belly-height.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Black hair from a bear's belly where it has been rubbing," I observed, handing it to him. "I've seen these things before. They seem to bite off a small tree near where they are denning, then use it as a scratching post."

My friend eyed me with mixed disbelief and nervousness. I leaned over and kicked up a hunk of very dry dung, breaking it open. In it were the sharply pointed hoof growths of a young fawn. I took them out and examined them, then tossed them to my friend.

"Aren't these fawn hooves?" he asked me.

I agreed that there wasn't any doubt that the bear had taken a deer during the time that it was denning up here. My companion got to his feet rather abruptly.

"I'm gettin' the hell outta here!" he said.

"Why?" I asked with somewhat amused curiosity.

"Hell," he replied, "That bear is eating meat! That's what I am."

I laughed, thinking he was kidding. All bears will eat meat. It didn't make this one any different from any other bear. Besides, there wasn't a salmon carcass less than two weeks old in the open-air den. Nuts! There probably wasn't a bear within two miles of us, considering the noise I had been making on the delta in order to scare the deer up the ridge.

I don't know what made me turn my head. I don't think I heard anything. About twenty feet away, just emerging from the mouth of the entrance, a big black bear was charging like an express train out of a tunnel. Her fiery, red-rimmed eyes were a sight I'll never forget, nor the loam spewing off her flying feet. I saw my companion break and run, hit the thick screen of hemlocks, then fall backwards. For some reason I dropped on one knee, yelling.

"For Chris' sake! Don't run! Shoot!"

The muzzle of my .32-20, which felt like a tube of toothpaste, started to belch flame as fast as I could pull the pump action back and forth. The first shot hit the bear in the front paw and she rose on her haunches with the loudest roar I ever heard. Blood splattered on my shirt and pants as she flung her paw around, and I hit her again in the front shoulder. Then in the chest. She seemed about to drop down on me when she spun around and started for the tunnel. My next bullet went through one side of the belly, and as the bear went through the opening, one of my bullets tore a tuft of hide off her rear end.

Two shots blasted out from behind me into the empty opening of the tunnel, the muzzle blast almost bursting my eardrums.

"Holy smokes!" I exclaimed, "What was that!"

I was shaking all over, and I had only to look at my companion to realize what I looked like, with my hair standing on end. We both sat down for a moment, using the old excuse that "they always stiffen up if you let 'em go awhile." A few minutes later we headed down the opening after the bear. She was throwing blood three feet up the trunks of the alder trees, and it was plentiful. We trailed her for over an hour by the blood sign, and came upon her, after circling a mile or more, within fifty yards of the den in which I had shot her. Her front shoulder was brok-

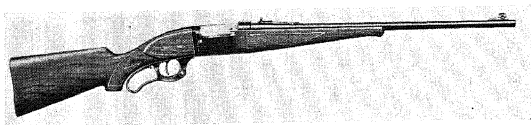
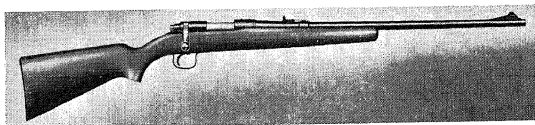
en, her lungs were punctured, and her throat was torn open. She was, in fact, a bit of a hair sieve. *But she had travelled more than seventeen hundred yards.*

Her teats had not yet lost the softness of the continual suckling of cubs, but they were without milk. You guess about it. We never saw any sign of cubs, none of us did, and we looked for them. There was no record of any cubs shot before, or right after, in the district. I think she had been feeding cubs all summer in the den we were occupying. I must have crossed her regular trail somewhere on the river bank. While we were sitting in the enclosure there had been a shot fired on top of the ridge (which we later discovered to be the effort of the other member of our party in downing a spike buck). Picking up my scent, the old she-bear must have found that it led into the den she had been using. She may have connected the shot above her with my scent, and the fact that one of her cubs had been killed previously by such a sound. Her resultant protective instinct may have made her charge me. I don't know. I don't know if bears are able to reason well, but I have evidence of their teaching cubs. No one can definitely say yes or no about the faculties of an inarticulate animal. I know only that I was charged by a black bear, with a witness present, and have a bear hide to prove it.

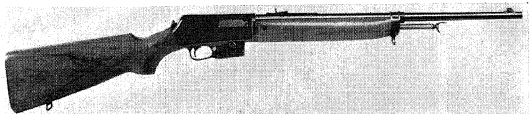
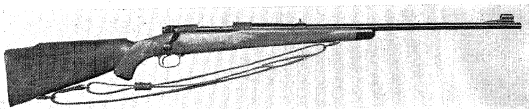
The sixteen-year-old son of a friend of mine went with his father to an old orchard, the approach to which consisted of three hundred yards of meadow. Two black bears were known to come there occasionally in the evening to feed on the fallen apples. My friend, Jim Forte, instructed his son to stand at the edge of the open meadow, where he figured it was safest, while he himself went down to the end of the orchard and endeavored to flush the bears into the open. He told Jim, Jr., to fire at the first bear he saw in the open and to keep firing until the bear went down, regardless of what happened.

He went into the orchard, and the bears came out into the meadow about two hundred yards in front of Jim, Jr. The boy fired and one of the bears went down. The other high-tailed it for the bushes. The lad did as he was told. He stood his ground as the bear got up. He was shooting a Winchester .35 Autoloader.

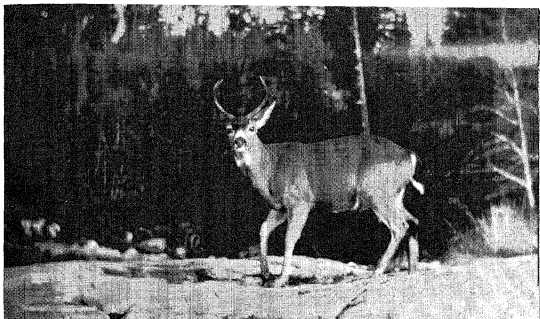




*Reading from the top:* REMINGTON MODEL 721AC bolt-action, big-game rifle, available in calibers .30-'06, .270, and .300 Magnum; REMINGTON MODEL 722 bolt-action, big-game rifle, available in calibers .300 Savage and .257 Roberts; REMINGTON MODEL 760ADL slide-action, big-game rifle, available in calibers .30-'06, .270, .300 Savage, and .35 Remington; SAVAGE 99-EG lever-action, big-game rifle, available in .250-3000 and .300 Savage; SAVAGE slide-action .22 rifle for small game.



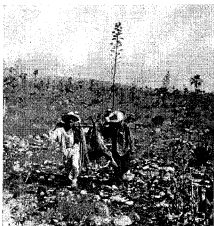
*Reading from the top:* WINCHESTER MODEL 70 bolt-action, big-game rifle, Super Grade 2, with Monte Carlo stock and sling, available in calibers .375 Holland and Holland Magnum, .300 H. and H. Magnum, .30-'06, .270, .257 Roberts, .220 Swift, and .22 Hornet; WINCHESTER MODEL G 7060 CN Featherweight bolt-action, big-game rifle, available in the new caliber .308 Winchester, weighing only 6½ pounds, a splendid new development; WINCHESTER MODEL 64 lever-action, big-game rifle in calibers .30-30 and .32 Winchester Special; WINCHESTER MODEL 94 lever-action, big-game rifle, also in calibers .30-30 and .32 Winchester Special; WINCHESTER MODEL '07 autoloading, big-game rifle, in caliber .351.



*Above:* the instant before flight; a thoroughly aroused animal is harder to kill than an unsuspecting one

*Right:* the long pull back to camp, but carry a rope for this purpose

*Below:* whitetail taken in the Mexican mountains





*Left: on shale and snow slides, look for the power-shovel digging of the grizzly*

*Below: the grizzly himself, snarl and all*

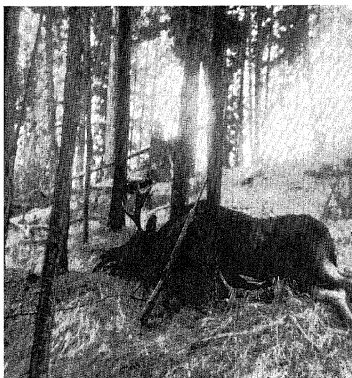
*Below left: a black-bear sow with her cubs—potentially dangerous if her young are threatened*





*Above left:* how a bull moose looks coming up from a lake shore; *right:* but hold your fire, there may be an even bigger one behind the first

*Below:* a young bull offering several hundred pounds of very edible meat



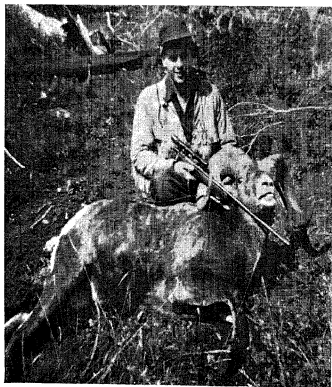


*Trophy:* one of the most desirable and most difficult to bag, a mountain goat. Inhabitant of the high and inaccessible peaks, he carries a fine head, the best of pelts, and flesh of excellent quality.



*Above* a bull elk with a majestic spread, *below* and the difficult terrain over which he has to be packed. Because of the encroachment of man, elk are now confined almost entirely to high country, reached by horse and mule pack or on foot.





*Above:* antelope, fastest animal on the plains, carrying prongs of mature size

*Below:* bighorn sheep which entitled Ray Des Rochers to a broad grin. Both of these animals are high in the list of desirable trophies, and their fat carcasses will delight you



The bear came at him and he knocked it down twice. While it was down he reloaded his clip of five. The bear got up and came charging toward him. He fired five more shots. The bear dropped a measured sixteen feet in front of him. It had nine .35 Winchester slugs in its carcass, each slug weighing over two hundred grains. Jim Forte, Sr., has never had a prouder moment in his life. He had seen the boy fire when he was in a position where he himself could not see the bear. When he got to where he could see it, he was in a bad position to fire, because of the proximity of a farm house. He still tells the story of how the young lad stood his ground. And rightly so! I'm telling you this in order to show you how much lead a so-called harmless black bear can pack and still keep coming *for two hundred yards!*

Some years back I wanted a bear rug for my den. I don't hunt bears and I seldom shoot one. But, wanting a rug, I went up the Somas River to a steelhead pool at which I had heard a bear had been seen regularly. Not wanting to waste a golden opportunity for fishing, I took along my steelhead rod. If I wasn't going to see a bear, I thought I'd at least fish at the end of the day, thus avoiding the risk of being kidded for coming home empty-handed. My plan was to hide in a rock cleft near the pool with my lunch and camera and read while waiting. You know, that was the lousiest copy of *Esquire* I'd ever tried to read. Or maybe it was that the resounding splash of jumping silver salmon and trout hurt my eardrums. (My ears are sort of sensitive to the sound of a jumping trout.) I got past the first gurl picture but somehow lost interest in feminine pulchritude. Partly in a daze, I suddenly found my steelhead rod all set up in my hands.

I hooked and landed a coho salmon, also two cutthroat trout. Then for about two hours I tried to drift my lure, just right, over a big steelhead that had been lying at the top end of the riffle where the pool sluiced out. I'm not as good at fishing as I am avid about it.

I ate a bite of lunch, then tried once more to get my line out right. By accident the lure hit the rock behind me, and on the return lit right in the eddy which would take it over the riffle. Bears? I'd forgotten they existed.

A big black animal with a rolling lope came silently out of the brush at the stream edge, jumped nimbly from rock to rock in the shallows, then stood. A prime black, silky coat rippled in the sun like the back of a finely curried horse, and long, feathery chaps streamed off the thick legs as the animal came up the bank toward me. I looked at the broad head and tufts of ears. Brother! What a lovely coat it had! I wondered idly what it would do when it saw me?

Ye gods! *My bear rug!*

I cast a glance at my lure just in time to see the big steelhead hit it hard. My reel screeched like a trapped banshee, and I was torn between two emotions I have never yet been able to define. I fought that steelhead for three quarters of an hour.

The bear? Oh well, he went up the side of the hundred feet of sheer canyon as if someone had goosed him with a sky rocket. Why didn't I shoot him? I don't know. I had a .35 Winchester Autoloader at my feet, and a 9-mm. Mauser pistol in my holster, and a camera for just such a picture strapped in front of me. I got the steelhead though.

Bear hunting is like that. In country of the West, in Washington, Colorado, Oregon, Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho there are still many bears. This goes also for western Canada. I have never seen a bear dog in my life. I've heard men say a dog was a bear dog, but on asking if it was trained, they said no. It just chased bears, they heard it barking at one. I've killed cougars with trained dogs from the Lee Brothers of Arizona kennels, but bear dogs just don't seem to be used in the Northwest. While down in Mexico hunting wild peccaries, I heard of bear hunting too. Although I did not participate in it, the general idea there seemed to be to take a pack of dogs into an area in which bears were known to roam, then let the pack loose. When the dogs brought the animal to bay, the mighty hunter went in and shot it from a safe distance. Pack hunting doesn't appeal to me, unless it is for a predator such as a wolf or a cougar; then it is not so much the thrill of sport as the satisfaction of a skillful extermination.

Bear dogs and bear packs were not intended to be used with our modern arms. In the adventurous olden times, when men

hunted with spears and bows and arrows, they had to come to close quarters to kill an animal. Their weapons were not really much more effective than the animal's fangs and claws, and at the effective distance for these weapons, hunters could, and often did, suffer personal injury. Under such conditions dogs had abundant justification. I know of one authentic case in which a Shushwap Indian, Joseph Nana by name, killed two grizzlies with a hunting knife and no dogs. But in later days when dogs were generally used, the hunter usually packed a one-shot rifle or a shotgun, and he had to get in close in order to hit his animal, and *he had to hit it right*. He could not pick out an animal at five hundred yards and, with the aid of high-powered scope, drill it in the chest cavity. He either had to stalk the animal to within twenty-five yards with the utmost bush cunning, or he had to have dogs that would bring the animal to bay, so that his comparatively ineffective weapon might have a chance of putting in a killing shot. Also at that time the bear meant lard, meat, and clothing, as well as sport, to the hunter.

Nowadays the bear means to most sportsman only a rug for the fireplace or den and the experience of having killed a more or less dangerous animal. Let's put it this way. Anything done the hard way becomes sport. It doesn't matter whether it consists in trying to land a fifty-pound salmon with a two-pound test leader, poking toothpaste back into a tube with the sharp end of a darning needle, or hunting a bear with a high-powered, scope-sighted rifle. Doing it the hard way, which means using your own powers of observation, hearing, and cunning, you are bound to get a certain amount of satisfaction from your skill and kill.

But, assuming that you still want to take your bear (and don't get me wrong, I was hell-bent on taking my first one), there are a couple of rules you might follow. Black bears are generally animals of the forest and streams. They like swamp country just as much as moose do, for they grub out luscious roots of lilies and the well-known skunk cabbage. In damp terrain one of the commonest signs of bear habitation is a wallow. If you didn't know what it was, you probably wouldn't give it a

second thought. A bear wallow is in shape and size very much like a bathtub used by human beings. Usually dug out of black loam, it is surrounded by a myriad of bear prints. There will be evidence of muddy water on the soil or leaves around it. Bears get into this bathtub and wallow in the murky water just as humanly as you do in clear water on Saturday night. As a matter of fact, bears would probably enjoy sailing a cake of soap if they had it. It is a jam-packed thrill to watch them on such an occasion. If you see such an unexplained hollow in swampy ground or in the trickle of a mountain stream, it is a good indication that a bear has been making the area his habitat. One more thing, the water may be crystal clear without a trace of mud in it, but remember that mud settles quite quickly and dries thoroughly in a few hours. But if the water is murky and disturbed, keep a good watch for the bear. He may be watching you!

I have never seen or killed a black bear on the bald top of a mountain. My experience places these animals by water and timber or brush. As I have said, during the seasonal runs of fish, which can be the salmon of the coast runs or suckers of the inland (be it the Atlantic or Pacific coast or inland), black bears will usually be found along the banks of rivers and streams. During the berry season they spend much of their time stuffing the ripe fruit into their insatiable innards.

There are several types of berries that especially attract them—the mountain blueberry, the wild raspberry, the huckleberry, the saskatoon berry, the salal berry, the salmon berry, and I'm told, the cranberry, although I have yet to verify this. There are two sure signs of the presence of bears in the berry patch—one is the rather large pancake (similar to the well-known cow chip), and number two, the stripped branches of the berry bushes. Bears, unlike their human counterparts, do not stop at the fruit when picking berries. They sweep a branch into their mouths, and leaves and all make up the cud. If the berry bushes you see are stripped and browning at the ends, the indication is that the bear has passed sometime before. If the ends are fresh, you might get your bear by waiting quietly until sundown.

On the streams where the fish are running heavy for the fall

spawning, you might see a bear any time. All species frequent the streams, and as this is their last fattening of the year, they feed at will, then lie down to sleep and digest their rich intake. The best manner of getting your bear by a stream is to find the pools that are filled with fish, then look around the pools for paw prints. If you think some crazy, pigeon-toed beggar has been walking in the mud in his bare feet, you're on the trail of a bear. Or, you may see a log turned freshly over, and the rotten residue under it spread around. Apparently nothing is more luscious to bears than ants and wood bugs. They will go to extreme effort to turn over a boulder two feet in circumference or a log of the same dimensions in order to lick up a few insects. So, having seen evidence that a bear has been around a given area, just you settle down with a good book and a lunch and wait. I don't advise having a fishing pole along. Or if this kind of waiting puts ants in your pants, mosey up and down the river very quietly, keeping out of full view of the water itself. A stream usually makes a fair amount of noise and will muffle anything but breaking branches from the ears of the bear. As a stream of water usually has a draft of air running down its course, and your scent would be carried ahead of you if you pursued it, it is better to go upstream than down, but I have come on three bears in one afternoon while fishing downstream.

In the spring many people hunt bears, and many legends are told of this time of hunting. It is an accepted belief that bears come out of hibernation with the first blush of spring flowers and bursting buds. At this season the animals are said to be fattest and most tender to eat. We'll put it this way. A bear hibernates with as much fat on him as he can get under his woolly hide. He goes into a comatose slumber during which his body temperature drops well below normal, his respiration becomes almost nil, and he lies through the winter in a secure hollow. Because of these conditions his body uses very little of the energy needed to sustain life, and the fat he carries to bed with him in fall is absorbed very slowly into his system. It is logical that the usually tough muscle tissue would tenderize, but it is also logical that during the months of hibernation he should lose most of his fat.

I have yet to see a bear within a couple of days of his leaving hibernation, but I have been told by trappers that there is nothing so sick-looking as a bear a week out of his winter den. Apparently it takes the animal some time to get into the habit of eating and adjusting himself to foraging again. Also, in the spring of the year the available food is scarce, as nothing has yet matured its natural foliage or fruit, except in the swampy lowlands.

It is most logical that the bears should be found around swamps at this time. That is where the growths with tuberous or even deeper running roots thrive. When bears move into the swamps at this time, they dig and eat both the roots and the foliage of such plants. Trappers say that the pelt is very poor at such stage, and apart from being skinny, bears are shedding their hair and rubbing great patches of it off. To shoot an animal in this condition would be very poor sport, indeed.

Of the guns that will down a black or small brown bear, I'm going to play it close to the chest. Many North American Indians still use a .22 rifle, and I know one Indian guide who has killed all of the black bears and grizzlies standing to his credit with such a gun. I also know an Indian who killed a cougar by climbing up the tree with his jackknife tied to the end of a stick. Lots of guts, you say? More than ordinary. But that Indian, like most primitive people, was much closer to nature than the huntsman who sallies into the woods once a year for a brief period. But I'm not writing recommendations for Indians—they don't need them. It's ordinary fallible hunters who concern us here. Frankly, I think too much is written about the different *guns* to be used for hunting game, and too little about the *man* who is going to hold the guns. Moreover, more attention is given to the animal facing the gun than to the man doing the shooting. Having owned and shot almost every gun from a .22 rifle to a .375 magnum, and having killed animals up to the moose and grizzly with them, it is my thought that I can speak here with knowledge, if not authority. I cut my animals open and find the results produced by a given slug. Starting with the .22 caliber of any velocity, I don't recommend it for the casual hunter for bear, or for anything else, for that matter. It is not that you aren't as good

a shot as the Indian. You have more nerves, and you might go astray. If you don't kill the bear outright, you may be in trouble, and if you aren't, then the bear, poor beggar, will be. I'm of the same opinion right up to the .30-30 caliber, which, in the hands of any fairly skilled shot will kill a bear easily. The same goes for the .32 Special, 303 Savage, and other rifles of comparative ballistics and weights of bullets. Any gun that is better, such as the .270 caliber, the 7-mm., the .300 Savage, .30-'06, .303 British, and right up to the Magnums, will kill any bear that ever lived, even if not accurately handled

I've killed one bear with a 32-20, and that bear went a long way because it did not have a well-placed slug in it. A .30-30 put another one down with one shot and tore the lung and heart cavity to pulp. A .303 British, in a Ross rifle, killed a black bear with one shot. It smashed the spine at the hump of the shoulders and ripped into the chest cavity, filling the lower parts of the front legs with lead and copper fragments—a very dead bear. The same .303 British sporting load smashed the forepaw of a grizzly, and going on through, tore the sternum off, a second shot, placed in the cavity below the jaws, smashed the heart and lungs to pulp. If that grizzly had been hit in the paw with a .22, he would have thought he had been stung by a wasp, but if he had been hit by a .375 Magnum, I doubt if he would have been smashed any more disastrously than with the .303, at least he wouldn't have been any more dead. Use what you want and what you know to be a legal weapon, but first figure out how good *you* are, how much nerve you have, and how rough a time you might get *and give* by going undergunned. For people who hunt less than I do, I would recommend a .300 Magnum in 180-grain, having a muzzle energy of 3,330 foot pounds, and fine accuracy—plenty for any bruin.



## GAME ANIMALS

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### 3 : *Moose*

ANYONE who has stood next to an elephant will know the feeling of awe a moose inspires when seen in the timber for the first time. Largest of all the deer family, it will sometimes stand six feet, six inches at the shoulder and carry a six-foot or greater spread of antlers above that. Occasional moose will weigh close to a ton, but a specimen of that size can still move as silently away from a hunter as a small mule deer can—if it wants to. But, unfortunately for the moose, it doesn't usually want to move away. A big bull moose is the boss of the woods unless a large grizzly is around, but it is hard for anyone to say which of the two animals would come out of a fight on its own feet. I have seen moose and grizzlies feeding within half a mile of each other, also the evidence from their tracks and droppings that each drank regularly from the same spring. This feeling of security from all other animals of the bush makes the moose a very easy animal to hunt, particularly in country that has not been hunted much by man. Of all our remaining game animals, it is in greater danger of extinction for this reason.

Like other deer, *Alces americanus*, as the moose is learnedly known, is a browsing animal, but unlike all other deer, it is semi-aquatic in its feeding. Of the many moose I have seen, I have yet to see one more than a couple of miles from a lake, river, or swamp. Two miles to a moose is like a city block to a man. He will range twenty miles in a day, and it is absolutely amazing to



see a moose go up a six-thousand-foot mountain and over the top. But such is the power of the great deer.

While hunting near Lost Basin, the most tremendous mountain swamp country I have ever seen, Jack Lacterman and I stood on the top of a seven-thousand-foot ridge late one October. Looking down into the swamp basin, which was covered with several feet of snow, we heard a rifle shot and saw a speck move out of the valley. Putting our glasses on the animal at a range of a couple of miles, we saw it head for the opposite side of the basin. The moose seemed to be not much larger than a BB shot, and behind it in the snow it left a trail that the sun etched like a pencil mark. As a matter of fact the moose's tracks looked just like an invisible pencil drawing a fine line up the mountain. It climbed from one clump of evergreens to another, as if it were tracing a point-to-point puzzle, obviously using the thick evergreens just long enough to turn around and look back on its own trail, then head for the next cover ahead of it. In the ten or twenty minutes that we watched that moose in heavy snow, it traced a pattern from the swamp to a height of six thousand feet, then disappeared through the bow of a saddle-back pass into another chain of mountains. The following year I climbed the same range up which the moose had moved like a rolling pill, and it took three and a half hours of solid, tough climbing with no snow to combat. That will give you some idea of how little sense there is to tracking a startled moose.

The only pretty thing about a moose is the loin steak of a fat young bull sizzling in a frying pan. So long in the legs that it has to get down on its knees to eat off the ground, it is almost like a giraffe in proportions. A moose generally feeds upon shoulder-high or higher twigs, or upon deep-growing water grasses and surface lilies for which it can wade into water hip-deep to a man and forage with ease. Tremendous in the shoulders and narrow in the haunches, with a misplaced hump above the withers like a camel's, and showing a long splayed nose, it is made all the more incongruous by the large tassel hanging down under its chin like a billy-goat's. What beauty it has comes from the awe-inspiring enormity of its frame and heft. It looks, walks,

and acts like power itself, whether it is wading or swimming in water, or leaping like a blooded stallion over logs, or striding majestically up a steep rock slide.

The first moose I ever shot was in the Canadian Rocky Mountains, near Banff National Park. I had put up a nice whitetail buck high up the side of a cranberry-covered ridge. As the buck had headed for the open country above me, I was going as fast as I could, hoping to get a bang at it in the clearing. Coming to the edge of the open space, I stayed just under cover, scanning the open hill ahead of me. The buck had simply vanished into thin air. I broke out into the open, rolled a cigarette, lit it with a noisy lighter, and sat puffing at the fragrant smudge. Across the valley below, my eyes wandered over the high, gray rock slides that were coming out of a rampart ridge of the rimrocks. From a hedge of cedar and juniper, a mountain goat strolled calmly into view, then another and another, until there were five of them strung along the face of the rock slide.

Watching them, I was trying to make up my mind whether it would be better to go on up the ridge upon which I rested or to try to make it over to the other mountain, then up the slide before sundown. I had been told that the bottoms of the slides upon which the goats were travelling were lousy with grizzly bears (so lousy that all the other hunters but my partner and I were travelling in pairs); and not wanting to have to shoot a grizzly, I demurred at the thought of going. I was just going to get up and continue hunting my ridges ahead.

About one hundred yards below me, just visible in the fifteen-foot pines, I saw a peculiar formation of dead branches. I studied the projection idly, speculating upon how much the dead wood looked like the antlers of the deer family. One of the dead branches moved!

There were two bull moose facing me!

I was so startled that I just looked at them. The last thing in the world I had expected was two bull moose standing shoulder to shoulder in a bunch of thick pines, particularly within a couple of feet of where I had broken out of the thicket only moments before. For several years I had been packing a Ross .303 rifle

which I had restocked as a sporting gun, and this was the first day I had carried my 7-mm. Mauser, which I had also reworked into a sporter. I flicked the safety over, because I had injected a shell when I saw the whitetail, raised the gun, and aimed at the big bull. He had thrust his head into the open, standing full to me, with four feet of antler-spread out of the bushes. I flicked over the safety and slapped the bolt back, ejecting the shell. I forgot to roll the bolt to lock the Mauser (the Ross is a straight pull), raised the gun, and squeezed off quickly. Nothing happened, except that the big bull moved into the thicket and the small bull stuck his head out.

I ejected another full shell, injected another, snapped the safety over and pulled on the shoulder of the big bull as he moved out into the open. Nothing happened again. I looked at the gun in amazement. It wouldn't fire. Well, no damn wonder! None of them is supposed to fire with the safety on!

I snapped off the safety, ejected another full shell, slammed in the bolt, turned it down, raised the gun. No moose! I turned over the safety, saw the big bull start to trot, pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. The moose had had enough of that green-horn, and he headed for the depths of thicket. Abruptly I realized that my foot was beating a tattoo on the hillside, my hands were slippery as a wet eel, my breath was coming in short gasps, my stomach was rolling over like that of a sea-sick lubber, and sweat was pouring into my eyes off my eyebrows. Apart from that I was shaking all over like a rummy with the snakes. Inwardly, of course, I was quite calm!

I looked over to where the young bull had been. He was still standing there. But, he had turned his head away. No doubt the spectacle the hunter was making of himself was too embarrassing to watch. I put up the 7-mm. The moose was dancing all over, and so were the trees! Finally they calmed down a little, then just as my top shoe laces busted under the strain I managed to squeeze a shot as the sights danced past the area behind the front shoulder.

There was a deep-throated cough.

Stupidly I looked behind me to see who was announcing his

presence, then there was a terrific crashing in the timber below me. I immediately thought that I was being charged by two furious bull moose. I whipped my gun up and stood ready. About two minutes later there was a thrashing of broken timber, the sound of deep chest coughing, and a few wheezy sighs. Then there was silence. What was the matter with *me*, you say?

Oh well! I suffer from malaria—some people say it is closely related to a northern fever known as buck fever.

This incident illustrates for you as a hunter the biggest hazard in hitting a shootable moose. It is the effect the big animal has on the nervous system. But this does not mean that there is not high danger and exciting sport in moose hunting. Far from it!

The moose is, like any wild animal, unpredictable in its actions when confronted by man. A hen grouse once flew in my face in an effort to protect her young, causing me a sprained knee ligament. If it had been a cow moose defending her calf, I wouldn't be here telling about it. Trappers say there is more to fear from the slashing hooves of a cow moose than there is from a grizzly. The bull moose is by nature phlegmatic. More often than not he will raise his tremendous horns, which look for all the world like the business end of a power shovel, turn his long nose toward the hunter, and stand there with a daring gleam in his eyes. He usually comes around to face the intruder with nostrils dilated, ears twitching, with graceful silent movements of his narrow hindquarters. If your bullet doesn't channel into his chest, and you move forward, he will shift quickly around, rump to you, and go quartering into the nearest thicket. That action means he has decided to leave. He will take a tentative step or two, then as graceful of movement as a seal, he will take off slowly for a couple of trotting steps, his hump rising and falling, whereat he really starts to move. He will clear five-foot obstructions as if they were twigs in his path, and move through thick brush without even the swishing of branches. Ask me how he does it? I don't know.

The only noisy moose I have seen or heard were in country where they had been shot at considerably, or where one was actually wounded badly. In the case of the former moose, they

seem quickly to realize the import of the sounds and smell of man. Startled, they will tear through anything for about one hundred yards, then there will be complete and utter silence. They usually keep going in the direction in which they have started, seldom back-tracking once they have identified the intruder as a man. And, if the man happens to be on horseback, moose, unlike deer, will go still faster. The moose seems to identify horse with man more readily than deer do.

Your first problem is where to find good moose hunting. The best advice I can give is that moose are usually found near water, not too far from a big lake, or in regions where there are big swamps near mountains. The moose is not a plains animal. As mentioned previously, a moose has to get down on its knees in order to crop ground growth. Look for willow, alder, red birch, and poplar thickets in the mountains; seek out lily beds and thick green water grasses on water, particularly near the ends of lakes and on slow-water sections of rivers. Swampy ground is particularly excellent, both because of the aquatic growth in pools and the small twig type of growth that hedges the pools of water.

As to moose sign, it could not be more plain if someone put up placards saying that moose were around. There is no dropping like a moose's. It is about the size of a pigeon egg, oval in shape, and, when fresh, deep brown. When dry, the dung is a chestnut tan with light lines in it, hard as a nut, and could be used for slingshot ammunition for grouse and squirrels. The hooves leave an unmistakable imprint, deep, wide-centered, quite sharply pointed, much like tracks of the mule deer or whitetail, but tremendous by comparison. This sign can be mistaken for the comings and goings of domestic cattle, but if you want to prove it is not, try to follow it into fallen timber or marsh. Moose go over logs and trees that would tear the teats of a cow in two jumps, and they go through marsh as if it wasn't there. Cattle stop at a two-foot log, and go only to the edge of a marsh.

Watch for slashing of tree bark. Moose seem to like red poplar more than any other trees for this job, perhaps because they feed on the poplar twigs more than elk or deer do (they are often in the same country, feeding within yards of each other), and

## BOOK I : *Hunting*

I have yet to see an antler-torn tamarack or coniferous tree that was used by a moose. The bark will be shredded and often hanging to the breeze, starting at the lower part of the tree and going up to seven or eight feet, usually only on one side (unlike the work of elk which will trample everything down around a pole and shred it from top to bottom on all sides). Moose will leave many saplings shredded partially, and this is a good and obvious sign that they are around.

Moose seem to be much less nocturnal than deer (such as mule deer and whitetails), and if snow is on the ground they will often bed down through the night. I have never seen one lying down during the day. They seem to forage for that big gut of theirs all day long, browsing much as cattle do, moving farther away from their beds all day and often not returning at night. Moose are much more migratory than is sometimes assumed. There is a very definite drift from north to south during the winter, at which time they yard up in herds or hang about the farms of settlers. This latter habit of feeding with the cattle has been a boon to the farmers, but a tough show for the moose themselves. Coming south to the low-lying farm lands, moose cause farmers to swear they are supporting the entire species if they see even a track crossing a pasture. The next step is to get a permit from the Game Department to *destroy* the animal, and as the weather has turned to freezing, they can kill the moose out of season, then have their winter's meat hung up in the shed.

Actually, it is not the fact of the farmer's killing moose that disturbs me; it is the subterfuge behind it. I know well, for I have spent a great deal of my life in the bush country, and can appreciate how an all-year-round inhabitant feels. In the first place, most bush farmers have eked out a poor living on the outskirts of civilization. They have cleared a few, or many, acres at a cost of back-breaking toil, whereas most of us buy our meat, flour, and vegetables in an air-conditioned store. The farmer or bushman kills for food, and he feels that the animals that provide him with sustenance were put there by God for his survival. He resents the minions of the law who drive big, high-powered cars at his expense, and who tell him he can't take what he

wants to eat. If the moose eats an ounce of his hay it seems like a carload, particularly because the game warden, who is usually his natural, if undeclared, enemy, is a member of a politically powerful government Game Department, which he feels sells his wild animals to rich and corpulent gentlemen, who so obviously drive along the highways in fashionable cars, blowing moose calls, and shooting at cows, while he, the farmer, is still trying hard to get his winter hay under cover.

The moose stands in the crossfire and takes the latter in the guts, both in season and out. His habit of feeding in the daylight hours leaves him open to shooting. Another habit of moose, when the season of hunting nears its close, is to take the easiest low-lying terrain as a course of transit, thereby leaving himself open to shooting by men who have only to drive the byways and slip out of the car for an easy shot. Hundreds of moose are taken that way each year. This is not sport. It is nothing but evil.

Part of any hunt is the work of taking out a carcass. I don't like what is called "trophy hunting," at least in the principal form it takes, which is to go out year after year and kill game animals in the hope of getting into the record books, along with a bunch of stuffy old coots who would get lost going to the can in the bush if the guide didn't keep an eye on them. The moose, because of his big head, bears much of the brunt of this type of hunting. Any bull moose is a trophy, and the meat of a younger bull is almost indiscernible from prime beef. To leave over a thousand pounds of meat in the bush for the jays and vermin seems to me a sacrilege. What I am getting at here is that many men will shoot the first bull they see, measure the head, and, if it isn't of near-record proportions, leave it, then try to find another. No attempt is made to get the animal skinned and to preserve the meat.

That is a chore in itself worth enjoying. For a man to go out after moose without a small hatchet or big, stout hunting knife is foolish. Unlike the technique required for smaller animals, it takes a much-clubbed knife blade to open up the moose's brisket, and if the chest is not opened up overnight, the whole enormous area of the front shoulders will gas up. If you do get

a moose down, do your utmost to smash your knife through the chest and open it up, cleaning out the terrific mass of lungs and heart. If you can't do it yourself, hurry back and get help as quickly as you can, or at least get an ax. From there on it is pure butchery, but the meat of a moose is worth it. I have seen moose with several inches of fat around the intestines and kidneys. The liver is as delightful as any you ever ate.

Moose, as you may have gathered from the foregoing, can be had from the lowest lying land to the highest mountains, but the most likely place to find them regularly are where the twig browse is thickest. That means in the deciduous patches of trees on hillsides or at the edge of waters. I have always found their beds in fairly open spots of deciduous growth such as birch, poplar, or willow, never yet among the conifers. Elk, on the other hand, seem to prefer an open stand of tamarack or other conifers.

Concerning the guns for moose, I don't advise anything less than a .30-'06 or .303 British, which are fairly close in all-round bullet weight and muzzle energy. Thousands of moose have been killed with the Winchester 30-30, which is one of the best bush guns on earth, but the slug is not really heavy enough, nor hot enough, to give a moose a fatal wound in a majority of cases. Remember, there is sometimes eight to ten feet of animal for the shot to travel through. I don't advise shooting at a moose if it is travelling fast, unless you are a really good running shot. There is little likelihood that you will miss, but there is also little likelihood that you will put in a killing shot. There is so much animal to hit, but there is also so much animal that a small slug won't anchor it.

I can use the deep penetrating 7-mm. in 175 grain to good advantage, but I am not keen on .270 for moose. The .300 Savage is much used in 180-grain, and the .348 Winchester is entirely adequate at medium range, as is also the .35 Remington. For moose, you can't beat the .300 Magnum, nor the .375.

Depending on the range, the bullet used must naturally differ. I am not a proponent of difficult shots, even though I have stumbled through various handgun and rifle matches, and if



called upon can sometimes execute a fair running shot. A moose is obviously a very large target, and up to one hundred yards the head is as easy to hit as the body of a small coyote, which is about the same size. Any slug with better than 2,400 f.p.s. muzzle velocity and at least 130 grains weight will smash into the brain from the side. A high-velocity, heavy-weight bullet is of course better. For the shooting of any animal, I advise the heart and lung shot, and unless a head shot is possible, I go out on the line so far as to say it is the only other shot to use on a moose. Spine shots are for the experts, of which I am not one.

The reasons for these recommended shots are simple. Few rifle slugs will smash the terrifically large bones necessary to cripple any two legs, and practically any shot except that driven into vital organs or brain will spoil a lot of very fine meat. I venture to say few men know the exact location of the spine from a side view, and fewer men are capable of driving a slug into the narrow line offered by this paralyzer. The neck shot on a moose, too, is only for the experts. As for the rump shot, which is discussed by some so-called experts, I think it is little short of malicious intent to wound. It will make a moose sick as hell, but it won't put him down ten times in a hundred tries. The type of hunter who has to resort to it on moose couldn't find a drunken elephant in a walled-in sandlot, and the ensuing tracking, assuming real tracking ability, would take a couple of days, with the probability of defeat at the end because of a badly bloated and useless carcass.

I have drifted one 7-mm. slug in behind the front shoulder of each of two moose. The big animals hunched up and started to cough, took ten to twenty steps, wobbled drunkenly, and dived forward on their noses. The slugs were imported Kynoch 7-mm. soft noses at 173 grains. The heart and lungs in both cases were torn up fatally, the main part of the slugs drifting only into the thin meat of the brisket. Not two pounds (unless you count heart meat) of edible flesh was spoiled in either case. Both animals were pre-bled into the chest cavity. I also stopped a running moose with the same shot and bullet after a friend of mine had put a Winchester .348 in its neck without even slow-

ing the animal down. If he had put that .348 into the head or chest, the animal wouldn't have gone fifty yards. I have used the .303 British with a soft-point, 215-gram slug in the same spot on moose, grizzly, goat, black bear, and mule deer, and have never seen one of the animals go over fifty yards

Some men build a whole lifetime of experience upon one gun that has been good to them and advise it for every type of hunting I have used a .38-55, or "Old Bush Cutter," as it is often called in Canada, and found that the low-velocity, heavy lead slug drifts a big hole without too much shock, but on the other hand I have found the small-caliber 7-mm. with its lightweight and relatively high-velocity bullet going inside and smashing a six-inch patch of innard all to pieces. One man who should know better advocated that a slug should go right on through and leave a big hole to bleed from, stating that high-velocity slugs expend their energy in a short distance, and that the small hole of entrance closes up, stopping the bleeding. He had evidently not heard of internal hemorrhage. By mistake I had a hard-nose army .303 cartridge mixed in my pocket with my soft-points. I drove that slug between two ribs, through the heart, and out between two ribs of a 200-pound mule deer, and heard the projectile whistle off into the woods. I had to skin the deer to find the holes. The deer had gone exactly twenty-five yards, and I was deluged with blood when I cut the diaphragm between digestive tract and respiratory organs.

The channel a slug cuts in a heavy-meated animal like a moose is blocked by chunks of torn flesh in most cases, and I hesitate to believe tales of animals bleeding to death, unless a main artery is completely severed in a fairly close position to the heart. The main functions of a big, heavy slug are to smash bones and impede the animal's natural agility. When you stop to think that the bullet from anything upwards of a 30-30 develops at least a ton weight of impact, and the force is metal striking bone, you will get some idea of what any bullet can do. However, I again repeat that a moose, because of its being eight to nine feet of animal, presents a big target to the eye and is easy to hit, but just for that reason the hunter should shoot at

it only with extreme regard for accuracy. If you are any kind of sportsman, you should know where your slug is going when you shoot, or you shouldn't pull the trigger, and if that doesn't appeal to you as advice, remember this bit. If you shoot today, you likely won't get a shot tomorrow, but if you let the animal go on a difficult shot, the next day it will likely be in the same spot, and you can then plan your approach and get in the shot that kills.

On the approach to a sighted moose, if it is not in range, I find that my pulse pumps a lot of silly thoughts into my brain. At such a time it is better to sit down for a couple of minutes and very quietly think things out. The moose has keen ears and also sharp eyes. I have never seen a moose within three hundred yards that wasn't looking in my direction. But that is good shooting range. Over three hundred yards and up to a mile or two, it is very unlikely that a moose has heard or seen you, if you have been normally quiet. Locate your animal by some cliff, snag, or other natural landmark, figure out the wind, and try to approach the animal, keeping behind as much growth as possible and only peeking at your quarry occasionally to be sure of its direction. Move on the most silent floor you can find, and, above all, avoid breaking twigs or branches. Watch the movement of the animal, if its head goes up and turns in your direction, get ready to shoot. A moose will at this time go into some cover, turn around and watch all movement in your area. He will seldom start to feed again after this maneuver. If he is not satisfied with his identification of you, he will disappear into the nearest deep cover as silently and effortlessly as a spook. I have never seen one come out of cover once he has taken to it, unless from a great distance and I saw the animal pass right through near cover and on to the next.

Moose hunting of latter years has been confined almost entirely to the northern part of our continent, particularly in Canada and Alaska, but at one time the range extended deep into the United States, at least as far south as Massachusetts. With the growth of population and the drainage of rich swamp land for cultivation, the moose has been run out of his natural habitat.

BOOK I : *Hunting*

In the past five or six years the animal has become more common, even in the southern part of the province of British Columbia, where each year a couple of thousand fall to the guns of hunters. I have found the Rocky Mountain chain, near the United States border, equal in good hunting to the Caribou and Prince George districts. Although the animal of the Rocky Mountains seems to be equal in size, my observations lead me to believe that the horn growth does not nearly equal that of the Northern British Columbia moose, with the largest heads being taken in the Kenai Peninsula, in Alaska, northern British Columbia, and the Yukon Territory.

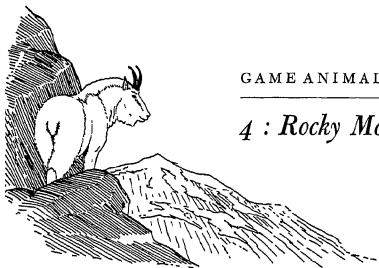
From the present state of apparent abundance it would seem that moose are on the increase, but I for one do not believe it. The continuation of the existing rate of kill will deplete the species to the point of extinction in not more than ten years. I believe that the opening up of roads into the north country has increased the annual recorded kill to the point where it would seem that the moose is more plentiful; actually, however, more hunters are gunning for them. With beef selling at fabulous prices, a moose provides the hunter with a five-hundred to a thousand-dollar bonus for a well-placed shot. As a matter of actual record, a hunter from the United States enlightened me on this when I asked him how a garage mechanic could afford to spend three or four hundred dollars to come to Canada and hunt moose. He said, "I like to hunt, and frankly it is cheaper for me to come to Canada than it is to stay in my own state. If I come up here, I have a good chance of getting a moose, along with deer, game birds, and fish. I usually get a moose. When I get back there are dozens of people after me for a chunk of moose meat. I sell it at a buck a pound, regardless of the cut, and they are glad to get it. That means I can get up to eight hundred bucks out of a moose and still have some meat for myself." This lad was a decent, genial sort of cuss. His attitude is much the same as that of many less outspoken Canadian hunters, who say it this way, "I figure that anyone who has enough nerve to ask me for a chunk of moose can pay me a dollar a pound to help me defray my hunting expenses."

Thus the fate of the moose seems to be decided.

There is, each year, a definite migration of moose from north to south due to the freeze-up and the greater depths of snow in the north. The rut occurs around November and the bulls are either belligerent or too downright interested in their love-making to pay much attention to hunters. Thus, migration, the rut, and congregation in new territory results in many more being killed than should be. Few hunters stop to realize that this apparent abundance represents the *population of hundreds of miles of North country concentrated in a small area*. Moreover, of late years, when I have been in the far northern woodlands, there has been every evidence of a larger wolf population in this region than is normal, and all the hunters and trappers I have listened to agree that the wolves were driving the moose farther south.

It seems a black picture to paint for the hunter who is looking into the future with a moose in his dreams. It doesn't need to be that way. There are several examples in the United States of sensibly controlled deer herds that have become over-abundant. The same regulation of hunting in all parts of Canada would assure a good moose population. I'd say, once you have shot a moose, you have had your fun and should be willing to forego others in the cause of sportsmanship, so that the boys who haven't taken one can look forward to their chance.

It is a great animal. I hope you get yours.



## GAME ANIMALS

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### 4 : *Rocky Mountain Goat*

SEVERAL TIMES, while in pursuit of less exciting things, I had seen mountain goats far off, foggy to the vision, quite unattainable at the moment. Photographs and motion pictures, too, had left me unprepared for the magnificent size and beauty of them, until one day I saw two grand, whole goat carcasses in a cold-storage locker while I was taking out some frozen venison. I stared at them for a moment, not realizing the snow-white carcasses were of mountain goats. Somewhere along the line I had come to think of mountain goat as being the size of a domestic animal, with little more appeal—an animal hard to get, a poor trophy, unsavory, having very strong meat. It is amazing how wrong such a conception can be. I begin to suspect that goats are somewhat like an unregistered gold claim, that the hunters of mountain goats have spread a myth of unsavory quality in order that others will not seek the mother lode.

The Rocky Mountain goat, known to naturalists as *Oreamnos montanus*, is not really a goat at all. It is actually an antelope that looks like a goat. Its closest relatives are the Alpine chamois and the Himalaya serow. A good-sized Rocky Mountain goat will go over three hundred pounds, is five feet long, and stands up to three and one-half feet tall at the front shoulder. The shiny black, ten-inch horns and the alert black eyes offset the snowy coat, just as bits of coal bring life to a snow man, and the habits of the goat are much like those of snow creatures everywhere.

## GAME ANIMALS : *Rocky Mountain Goat*

Goats live most of their natural lives high in the barren, snow-clad peaks and slides of five- to ten-thousand foot mountains. If the goat is on your list, that is where you will take him.

At one time the mountain goat ranged from Alaska to California, generally from the eastern part of the Rockies to the Pacific Coast Range. Now it seems that British Columbia has the only shootable animals left, although I believe the goat is making a bit of a comeback in Washington and Idaho, perhaps even farther south. Never an abundant animal at any time, the goat has nevertheless survived for the probable reason that the average hunter doesn't feel the game is worth the terrific climb. Few men not in excellent health can entertain the hope of actually taking a goat. For myself, I place it and the mountain sheep as the two trophy animals most worth going after. I don't hunt just to kill animals, and going after a goat takes me into country that is so rugged, so beautiful, that it doesn't seem to be part of the earth. When I go after any other animal, I expect to get it in a couple of days of hunting, but goats are not like that. You expect to pack heavy and trek far, sleep out in the frosty air of a six-thousand-foot valley, climb until your lungs feel they won't hold enough breath, and exercise generally so that your blood courses hot and clean all through your body. Sweat in your eyes, knots in your calves, thirst on your lips, a hungry rumble in your gut, and a feeling of freedom to look down on the earth below—all go hand-in-hand, and *then* you see a goat, still a couple of thousand feet above you!

Although I know of at least two men who have taken mountain goats from boats at sea level, the chances of your doing that are slim. Both of those men plied the sea lanes near our coast daily, year after year, both were admittedly lucky in seeing and shooting goats at this level, both had only the one opportunity to do so. The mountainside upon which they made their kills falls from a height of six thousand feet right into the tide of the ocean. There was a very heavy snow on the mountains in each of those years, reaching down to the salt water. My guess is that the depth of snow was so great on the summits that the goats were forced slowly to the water's edge in order to forage.

The question, Where are mountain goats found? has an obvious answer. Any range of mountains, at least in British Columbia, that reaches to the heights at which snow remains most of the year round is likely to harbor goats. My experience places the natural feed and habitat as somewhere above the six-thousand-foot mark. The goat's natural feed is short grass, pine needles, and deciduous foliage. When you get up into goat country, you wonder why in the name of sense any animal would pick such barrens to live in, except for the view. The goats I have seen have never been far from the muddy slides that come right out of the rimrocks, yet the goats pick the tops of the slides, where the least luscious of the mountain growth gathers a precarious sustenance. On one mountain top which seemingly grew no more foliage than the fringe on a bald man's head, I saw six goats lounging happily in the September sun. A thousand feet below them there was enough luscious growth to feed a herd of a hundred goats all summer. Although I traced the goats' tracks and droppings to the edge of the muddy slide, I couldn't figure out then why they stayed up above, and I still can't. Deer, which are of similar agility, will range heights from two thousand to four thousand feet in a night, feeding on the lowland during darkness and returning to the ridges by day.

I noticed many ptarmigan inhabiting the same high reaches as the goats, and the only vegetation I could identify consisted of pine of a very stunted bush variety, bushy juniper, a variety of cottoneaster, sometimes called "mountain cranberry," and some very, very sparse shreds of thin grass. The feed did not seem even enough to fill the crops of the ptarmigan. There was no moss or lichens upon which the goat is supposed to feed, yet the bellies of the two goat we took were full of green, finely masticated food. The shredded food appeared to be the leaves of the cottoneaster, mixed with perhaps pine and small alpine plants.

For myself, I have found that a camp at not less than five thousand feet is the best base for goat hunting. Any lower camp will make the ascent to the altitude of ten thousand feet at which the goats live almost impossible. The higher the camp site, the more likelihood there is of getting a goat before supper. At camp



height it is sometimes possible to pick out the white dots that are goats, so the hunt should be planned to bring the hunter out at the same level as, if not higher than, the goats. I don't give much credence to the advice about always coming at goats from above, on the presumption that they don't expect an adversary from above. Goats do not expect an adversary from any position. They will move away from a sighted hunter, and they can climb so much more quickly than a man that it is useless to try to catch up with them. When startled they will go downhill, laterally along precipitous slopes, or at any angle upward. I think one reason they go upward is the natural advantage which their protective coloring (white) affords in the snow above them. They, like any animal, will take refuge behind either bushes or rock ridges, and will stop at the top edge to peer backwards, so as to place the intruder, then go quickly to the next cover, until they are finally over the top of the mountain.

Some clever men tend to estimate the goat as a stupid animal. Perhaps because I am closer to the goat's intelligence I find him *no less wily* than any other animal, and at the same time so trusting of his own ability to climb out of his natural enemies' way that he will treat a hunter just as he would a cougar or grizzly, keeping the predator at a good and tantalizing distance. He has no way of knowing that a man's rifle will strike him at up to a five-hundred yards. I think that if some of the clever hunters tried to chase him along the slides, they would soon find that they never got any closer than the distance at which the goat first discovered them, or at least at a distance which the goat sensed as the margin of escape. I have had grizzly, black bear, whitetail, moose, elk and innumerable other wild animals and birds allow me so close to them that I could hit them with an easily pegged rock. Some I could have hit with a stick. In almost every case I was in country in which few if any men (and few men go into goat country) had been for a period of from one to five years. The animals all acted in a fashion that might be called stupid. They stood and stared at me. No doubt they thought, "What manner of animal is this that is split up the middle and walks on the split ends?" The stench of a sweaty

man so far outsmells any animal I have ever touched that it alone is enough to make an animal wonder what purpose man serves. The only other thing that smells as bad is a scared skunk. Goats, like deer in country that is well hunted, develop such an aversion to mankind that the only thing that can be put on them are field glasses.

They have such keen eyesight that, if you see them, it is likely that *they have already seen you*. For this reason the approach is better on their own level or from above. Figure it out. From a height the goats can survey an immense area below them and see any continuous movement towards them. But approaching from the side, or from above, the goat suffers disadvantages of contours of the land and bushes, which shield the hunter from his vision.

If you have ever been on a shale slide, you will know that it would be easier to go up it on stilts than it would be to go down. The feet of the goat are small and round like the ends of stilts, with sharp outer edges and spongy, almost rubber-like, centers. When a goat leaves an intruder, it is easier for him to quarter away and up, but if the terrain is easier, he may go directly away on the same level.

A goat is agile, but I don't think any more agile than a deer would be in the same country. I remember a mining engineer telling how he and his partner, one man approaching from above, the other from below, so confused a goat that they ran him into a fifteen-foot cliff wall. The goat seemed to be floundering in the loose shale as much as they were. My friend, who was an enterprising sort of cuss, tossed his climbing rope over the goat's head and yanked him off his feet as he started to charge. He had the rope wound around his waist and wished he hadn't. The goat dragged him fifty feet across the slide on his backside and belly before he could let go. Meanwhile his partner was so convulsed with laughter that he couldn't move to help him. Their respect for the goat went up immeasurably. My friend says the animal was about two-thirds grown, weighing not over one hundred and fifty pounds, but the pull on the end of the rope was like that of a scared wild stallion.

In September, 1952, Bob Kuhn, the nationally famous painter and illustrator of animals and the outdoors, and I went back into the Rocky Mountains near Athalmer, B. C. We packed in on horses for two days to a height of about six thousand feet. We had goat in our minds, but not as a prime objective, because we had been told that the snow basin was elk country. When we got to the spot for a base camp, we waited until the following morning before going up to survey the basin. On arriving at the edge of the elk country the following morning, we found that the tremendous basin had been cleaned out by one enormous snow slide, strewing the access to the valley with literally hundreds of thousands of downed trees. It was impassible to the horses, so we started to look for a possible trail over a hog-back ridge. Somewhere on the way up, around the eight-thousand mark, one of us said, "Hell, if we are this high, we might as well go after goat." That did it!

About fifteen hundred feet above us was a cleft in the rimrock out of which a high reaching slide started. For half an hour we slithered, struggled, cussed, and prayed until we got to the edge of the rimrock. Looking down, we could see for miles around, and after a brief rest and a drink from a fresh spring out of the rimrock base, we started up the precipices themselves. It was mountaineering, up a cliff face. Even the feel of a rifle, pulling back on the sling, made it seem as if it were trying to dislodge us from the handholds. Sweating profusely, we climbed over the edge of the rim. The hoof marks of goats showed up immediately. The slant of the land was about the same pitch as the sharp angle of a Tudor- or English-style, cottage roof. Except on the odd, upthrust rock, we could not sit anywhere without sliding into our heels, and that made it ideal goat country. The whole peak was a mixture of sliding topsoil, shale rock, and snow slides, with vegetation at an extreme minimum.

While we were watching five elk feeding in the basin for which we had originally started, I picked up a couple of white blobs in my Weaver K 2.5 hunting scope. Over a mile away, I watched them standing for some time, but I didn't say anything

I have been fooled by white or quartz rocks before, and, as a matter of confession, earlier in the morning I had seen a big single billy high above us but had discarded it as a rock, so I was very casual now about the two goats—just in case I was wrong. But Bob's high-powered prisms picked up the goats quickly.

We were in a shallow cup of the mountain peak in full view of the goats. There were some contours, not over twenty feet high, between us, no large foliage, few rocks. It looked like an impossible stalk. The two animals were joined by a billy, and the family of three bedded down on the mountain face while we watched them. From there on it was a pure Indian sneak, sometimes in the open, sometimes trying desperately to slide on our bellies behind a foot-high boulder, getting into a hollow of a shale slide, and trotting as fast as we could for a short distance in order to gain time. Finally, as luck would have it, we ran into a deep slide, with a jutting ridge between us and the goats. It was ideal. As we peeked carefully over the ridge, we found ourselves not more than one hundred yards away from them, and they were still lying down. Some movement we had made had put them on their feet, then they started to move along the ridge.

Bob put down the big billy with a .300 Savage bullet in the spine, and I dropped the female with a lucky heart shot. It was not until we examined the downed animals that we knew the sex of either of them, the female being almost fifty pounds heavier than the male, higher at the shoulder, and longer in the horns. It had been at Bob's sporting insistence that I took the bigger animal. When they both went down, they rolled and caught in big boulders, otherwise they would have rolled right off the side of the mountain and over the thousand-foot drop from the rimrock.

When freshly shot, the goat is a very unwieldy animal to handle, being usually over the two-hundred-pound mark, very deep and round in the body, with short legs and a big belly. On the forty-five to sixty-degree slope which is their habitat, a goat will roll like a barrel, and it is no wonder that many hunters

lose trophies over cliffs. If a goat doesn't roll into an obstruction, it will just keep on going until it falls over the rimrock, above which the goat clan usually lives.

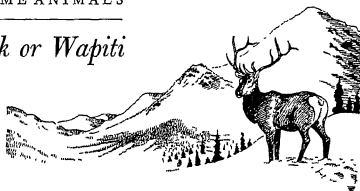
Probably the most efficient equipment with which to take and preserve mountain goats is the gear used by Alpine enthusiasts. In dry weather, running shoes and a warm shirt and pants are sufficient, but I like the six-inch height, cleated-sole rubber shoes common for slushy weather. They give enough support to the ankles, and are good on the rock and wet mud of slides. Nailed boots might be good, but I think a little too noisy in the shale. Any good wool shirt and pants, or a light quilted jacket, will give enough warmth, and I don't advise heavy clothing on the last part of the climb. Discard all but rope, rifle, knife and lunch *before* you head into the rimrocks. You won't need your glasses after you have sighted the goats, and the work you will have getting out your kill will keep you plenty warm.

Two bits of advice for the hunter who hasn't taken a mountain goat: don't let anyone tell you the meat isn't good, and don't let anyone talk you out of the hide. In the first place, the meat of a mountain goat is not goat at all. It is *antelope*. The animals are usually as fat as pigs, and they have plenty of meat on them, because they need heavy muscling to climb in the country where they live. The flavor is much like spring lamb, tender and juicy, and a goat haunch roasted on a spit in front of a big campfire is as delicious a barbecue as any in the meat line, including gram-fed pork or beef. To me it is far superior to venison. Guides don't like packing meat, unless it is for themselves, and they will most often dump any animal that they can't pack conveniently on the horses. Sometimes they will take the cape and head and leave the goat for so-called "grizzly bait." Insist on getting the goat down with you, but don't be afraid to do your share of the packing and lugging. The hide is one of the most beautiful of all those available on game animals, and in my book goes right along with the polar bear, the hide of which it closely resembles in texture, thickness, and color. Ranging from pure spun white to a creamy color, some of the thicker fur on the billies is tinged with urine on the underbelly. That undesir-

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able hair can, and should be, cut away. It is the same on any heavily furred male animal, no worse on the goat. There is a superstition that if the hair touches the meat, the whole goat is spoiled. That is ridiculous and unfounded. The hair smells much like that of any wild animal, but is clean and white and it is so thick that it is hard to make an incision in it for skinning. It is desirable, in skinning any animal, to split the hide in such a manner as to keep the hair from collecting on the surface of the meat, and this principle is no more or less desirable in handling a mountain goat. Tanned up, the fluffy fur makes the finest, warmest bed mat to step out onto that anyone would want. Hung on the wall of a den with its mounted head, it is an excellent appearing trophy. And, to anyone who has also hunted goats, you will be understood to be a man well worthy of consideration as a hunting companion.

## 5 : *Elk or Wapiti*



THE FIRST ELK I ever saw trotted around an immense boulder just as I rode around to meet it. I will never forget the majesty of the animal, its antlers seeming to tower over me. For just one moment it surveyed my horse and me, its head tall and proud, its body gleaming gold and russet brown, the branches of its antlers glistening in the sunlight. A moment later it pivoted gracefully on its slender hind end, snorted, and hustled a cow elk down the side of the mountain, moving as effortlessly as a puff of down on a mountain breeze.

My partner, who was immediately behind me with the only gun we had, was just as enthralled as I. He stared after it wonderingly, not even trying to lift the rifle from the scabbard. We were hunting camp meat, many miles back into the Selkirk Range, and had been following a buck and doe track over barren, newly burned forest land. It was as if the Old Fellow in the Sky had said, "Here, fellows! I'll give you a look at a real animal," then stayed our hand from shooting it. I'm glad we didn't take it. The elk is majesty in the bush, majesty, beauty, grace, and elegance, a trophy no man should take more than once. As an animal it is an ornament to our forests. As meat it is no more than venison.

The American elk is a member of the deer family, the second in size in that group, and its true name is wapiti, while for scientific purposes it is called *Cervus canadensis*. Formerly the

elk, or wapiti, ranged from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific, south into New Mexico, California, and north somewhat beyond the fiftieth parallel. With its height at the shoulder sometimes exceeding five feet, and the record heads going over sixty-four inches along the beam, it stands almost at the height of the moose. Body length exceeds eight feet in larger animals, and the weight will go from six hundred to eight hundred and fifty pounds. Pound for pound, it is said to exceed range cattle in edible meat.

Elk are partial to country with about an equal amount of open grazing land and forest. All of them I have seen have been at least a day's trek by car or horse into the fastness of the mountains. They seem to choose valleys that are bowl shaped, with a certain amount of rolling meadowland, not too precipitous in terrain. Unlike moose, they can and do graze heavily on short growth, for before men drove them into the mountains, they were actually plains and valley animals. In the winter they have a tendency to come onto the open plains settled by man, and many of them are illegally killed at that time.

I remember picking up one of two antlers that looked only a season old. They were in the yard of a renegade Indian. Out of curiosity I measured the main beam. It was sixty-two inches long, and I asked the Indian how it was that he had a near-record set of antlers. He shrugged and grinned.

"That one dam big bull elk," he said. "He come down side my cabin las' winter, long of two cows. I shoot him three time the head with .22 rifle 'fore he die. Other two bull I kill only take one shot the head, same like cow elk."

The Indian lived at the edge of a lake in the Kootenay Valley, which has long since been claimed by man for his own cattle. His cabin was near a pass that led back into the mountains, used by elk since time immemorial in the migration from the summer feed to the winter graze. As an Indian and by right of his being a ward of the government, he was allowed a permit to take game for food *when in need*. Actually I think he took the elk he spoke of with a feeling of priority. After all, the Indian lived on this continent for time beyond knowledge, and elk



provided his natural winter meat. Yet the game was not decimated as it was soon after white men came. I won't ever try to be a referee, let alone a judge, but I do think it would have been better to feed that man all winter than to risk the necessity of his taking one or more elk. How many such animals are killed each year, I don't know, and would hate to count. This type of killing almost always occurs during the very hard winters, when the elk are forced to try to find forage on the lower levels. It is at this same time that scores of elk are killed by the elements and predators. It is the time when every effort should be made to sustain the elk bands.

Probably the most polygamous of the deer family, the bull elk rides herd on his group of cows as faithfully as a collie dog on a bunch of sheep, and he treats younger bulls just as a collie will treat a predator. For this reason the elk is usually fairly easy to hunt and take. The greatest number of elk I have ever seen consisted of nine cows and fawns with one bull. I just happened to look up from the cleaning of a moose, when I was about fifteen hundred feet below the harem. They came out of a fringe of timber at about six thousand feet, much like a herd of cattle being driven toward a pasture by a man on a horse. As I watched them the bull came out of the timber last. The cows and two fawns stopped occasionally to graze, but the bull had other ideas. He would let them graze only so long, standing with his majestic head erect, glancing up and down the mountainside with a look of prideful ownership and suspicion, then he would nudge the rear cow along and start them all moving. I watched them cross about half a mile of quite open slope and disappear into the cover of sparsely growing poplar and pine. The bull didn't feed once, and a short time later I heard the peculiar bugle for which his kind is known. No one that I know has yet been able to describe it so anyone could identify it easily, so I won't say any more than that, once you have heard it, you will never forget the power and the demanding quality of it as it echoes through the valleys and mountain crags.

This herding of cows by the bull gives the hunter an unparalleled opportunity for spotting movement, even at a dis-

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tance of two to three miles in country with fair cover, and without the aid of glasses. The movement of one animal would probably be unnoticed, for the gold and brown coat of the elk blends exceptionally well with the autumn colors, particularly with the colors of tamarack. Once elk are sighted, it is best to get yourself into cover, after you have marked their direction of travel.

I remember one herd of six elk that we sighted while hunting the Rocky Mountains near Windermere. Bob Kuhn, the animal illustrator, and I, with Louis Capilo, an old Indian guide, had come to the very peak of a mountain. We were hunting sheep at the time, scanning the near-by slopes with glasses. Louis handed the glasses to Bob, pointing to a big snow basin some two thousand feet below us and two miles distant. He said one alarming word.

"Elk"

Bob took the binoculars, and I put my hunting scope on them. Sure enough, strung out like a resting pack train, with a bull behind them, were five cows. We watched them cross the semiglacial basin and disappear into the timber of a narrow pass. We closed the gap between us and them by at least three quarters of a mile before shooting two mountain goats. There were at least four shots fired, and I thought that would be the end of the elk hunting.

The following morning bright and early, we rose to newly fallen snow, the first of the season. Dragging myself up the razor-back ridge which it was necessary to climb to enter the snow basin, I kept telling myself the elk would have fled miles away. Actually I did not want an elk, because I had taken the species before, but since Bob was new to big-game hunting, we were eager to get at least a close look at them. How close he was going to get, none of us would have believed.

Rising into the sharp summit of the ridge we were climbing, I broke out of the timber and about a thousand yards away I saw the band of grazing elk. We looked over the territory but it seemed impossible to make a good stalk. Below us the timber was as thick as feathers. Beyond that there was a narrow hundred-yard valley with an open, level floor. The slope below us

was very steep, and the snow was the kind that is wet, slippery, and goes *puuud, pud*, as if an army is approaching. I slipped and fell on my patoot, had branches whistle off my canvas jacket, broke twigs, and generally raised hell all down the hillside. It made me feel better when I stopped a couple of times to hear both Bob and Louis coming, as thunderous of approach as I was.

Finally, after about twenty minutes of holding my breath, I pushed aside the last pine branches between us and the meadow and saw what I expected. Nothing! The new snow of the meadow floor was cut with hoof marks in every direction, as if the band had milled considerably before taking off at the sound of our approach. Louis, who supported sixty odd years of bush life, looked dejected, as did Bob and I.

He said, "Maybe we go very quietly over this next ridge, we get a long shot in the open country."

We all agreed that it looked as if it were our only chance. I led the way, moving quietly, watching for a break in the timber, skirting a quite open patch of tamarack. There were quite fresh tracks of several animals in the snow, and they seemed to be by-passing the tamarack stand. Something, I don't know what, made me look deeper into the fringe of pines that hedged the stand. Not twenty-five feet from me was a cow elk. My hand went up instinctively to warn Bob and Louis, but Louis, who was watching the hoof cuts in the snow just then, did not see the warning movement. Bob stopped but Louis moved on with a soft pud-pud in the snow. The cow in front of me got up nervously, then I moved from behind the fringe of pine, beckoning to Bob

In front of me, within a circumference of twenty-five yards, were four cow elk lying down. The movement of the cow that had already got up disturbed the bull, who had his magnificent head cradled in a snooze over his front legs. He was just behind a small hedge of mixed pine and willow. I motioned Bob to hurry. The bull got up not twenty yards away, and stood looking at me with an unbelieving look on his proud face.

"Shoot, Bob!" I whispered.

"I can't. Snow in my scope. You shoot!"

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"Hurry," I insisted, as I saw the bull fidget, then take a few steps forward.

"He's yours," pleaded Bob. "Take him. Can't see a thing."

"Wipe your scope He'll stay a second," I hissed.

I looked down at my own scope, which I had wiped a few moments before, and a great temptation filled me. Louis, who couldn't hear a thing without his hearing aid, plodded up at just that time, and, seeing the big bull elk standing in full view, yelled:

"Shoot the bull! *Shoot the bull!*"

Bob was desperately trying to pick up the animal in his smeared scope, while the other cows were getting up one by one and trotting after the first cow, which had disappeared into the close hedge of pine above. At the short distance, the field of the scope was limited and with the obstructed viewpiece and the cows in motion, Bob became slightly befuddled. He kept pleading for me to shoot the bull, and I kept praying that he would get his scope clear. I raised my gun to cover Bob's shot as I saw him get the gun to his shoulder. Suddenly the bull took off with the ease of Santa Claus's reindeer. In six majestic leaps, he bundled the last cow ahead of him with his horns and shot into the deep shadows of the pine, just as Bob got him in his scope and fired. I tossed a hopeless shot at the entrance to the shadows as the gorgeous rump disappeared, but my heart wasn't in it. I didn't want the elk myself, but I had hoped mightily that Bob would be able to take it.

He grinned apologetically, although there was no need, and grimaced, "After you, my dear Alphonse! No! After you, my dear Gaston! Why the hell didn't you take him, you silly goof? He was yours and I couldn't see."

I grinned myself. Louis looked at us with a deep Indian look that plainly told us he at least thought I had been eating loco weed.

While Louis and Bob cut around the mountain in the hope of getting another shot, I followed the great deep splashes of the running hooves. At ten thousand feet up, they suddenly cut the top of the ridge, then followed the brow down again for a couple

of thousand feet, swung in a back track to within *two hundred yards of where we had put them up*, then sped straight up the valley to the pass between two mountain peaks. I followed to the rim of the other basin, and below me saw the tracks slashing the sparse snow for two thousand feet. I still didn't want the bull, but I had wanted to see what the actions of the bunch were. They proved to be those typical of deer.

Once put up, the elk went straight up the hard way, always keeping a hedge of growth between them and the downside of the hill, never going to the top edge of an open spot when crossing it. The double-back was absolutely what a hunter could expect of whitetail or mule deer. If we had gone one hundred yards to the right of where we were, sending one man to keep them moving, the other hunters could have sat down, relaxed, and had a clear, open, and easy shot. I said *no*. Most hunters are decoyed by emotion into following such a fresh track. It is hard to sit and wait while the animals pound ahead into an unknown territory.

The moral: Treat elk like deer. They will act just the same because they *are* deer.

There are many signs that will tell of elk without your actually seeing the animals. Probably the most evident sign is the cleft span of the big hooves. They are a big edition of the cut of those of a mule or whitetail deer, much more deeply sunk into the ground. If you are in doubt whether the tracks are those of a moose or an elk, you can tell much from the droppings. Moose droppings are large and made coarse by the rougher browse consumed by the animals, while elk droppings are merely a larger, dark version of the deer kind, but only a little larger. If you follow a fairly new track for some time and find the droppings along it are of the elk type, then you are pretty sure of the nature of the beast. When both hoof marks and droppings of the two animals, moose and elk, are together (and it is often so in the Rockies), very few except real bushmen can tell them apart.

If you can't be sure after applying this method of identifying the animals, you can watch for other signs. The elk bull will

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pick a slope on which he can view a whole large valley, and from which his bugle will sound out through the miles of forest. Usually near meadowland and water, he will strip a lone coniferous tree of bark from as high as he can reach almost down to the earth. He will trample the ground on all sides, bushes and all, leaving a green flag of bows at the top of the sapling where he can't reach with his horns. I have seen this sign several times, and have always seen elk directly before or afterwards. It reminds me of a miniature parade ground around a flag, with the well-worked appearance of earth after the steady drilling of recruits. It is an unmistakable sign, because no others of the deer family, except the moose, can reach so high. The moose seems more to rove in search of companionship, scarring many trees as he travels, most often the deciduous type. I have noticed that blacktails, whitetails, and mule deer do the same thing that elk do, but on a lesser scale. Near this marker there is usually much scuffing and indentation of the soil. I don't know whether it is from the milling cows or from the battles fought with other bull elk who answer the proprietary bull's challenge. It has never been my luck to see such a ground during use by the elk.

The elk has a reputation of being able to carry a lot of lead a long distance. He can certainly carry as much lousy shooting as a moose, but he shouldn't have to. Maybe I have a phobia against casual shooting at almost impossibly distant game, but after losing two wounded bucks many years ago through just *trying*, I sickened at it, and I don't often shoot now unless I'm sure of my shot. Every man has his weaker moments, and the desire for an animal will make him blaze away in a species of hope mixed with desperation. He is doing less good than he would if he held his fire. Often even a fast running animal will stop for another look when he doesn't hear any sound of firing or pursuit. He stops to be sure of *what* the danger was, and where he saw it. An elk will do the same thing. Remember, there is a lot of animal to put down, and nothing but a good shot befits a real sportsman.

I saw one elk hit by a Winchester .348, which drove through the front shoulder blade and smashed into the lung cavity. He

proceeded to carry that 250-grain bullet for three quarters of a mile. He got up to face the hunter when the latter approached, yet had left a blood trail of the kind a bullet hole in a can of red paint would leave. The hunter put another 348 in the elk's spine at the neck, but the animal rolled over, crashing into the thick pines, still trying to struggle to his feet. The first shot would have killed him in an hour or two, but if it had not messed up his lungs he would have had a more lingering death.

On one occasion I used a 7-mm. Mauser with a 173-grain bullet (a caliber which, in somewhat lighter projectiles, closely resembles the Winchester .270 in ballistics) on a heart and lung shot at 250 yards. The elk staggered, hunched up, staggered, and went down on his front knees, struggled up, looking as if he were going places. I drilled another shot within two inches of the first which went through and lodged in the shoulder muscles on the opposite side. After that he went only about ten feet before his rack clicked down among the boulders. This experience made me more in favor of the heart shot than ever. I'll admit it sounds boastful to say you can hit an animal in the heart, but actually this is the easiest of all shots, except from the rear-end view, and if you're really good you might even be able to make that one, too. The heart shot is placed in the biggest area of the body. It can be five inches low or high on a big animal without making too much difference. High, it becomes a spine shot, low it becomes a lung shot. Belly shooting is, of course, inexcusable.

The .30-30 Winchester has put many great animals of this continent to rest, as have the Remington .32 Special and the .300 Savage, but I don't advise anything less powerful than one of them on elk. Any of the rifles of comparative bullet weight, velocity, and general ballistics, and all those that are rated higher, are sufficient for the hunting of elk. The main factor is the man who holds the rifle, regardless of its caliber or ballistics. When you shoot at an elk, give it the dignity of a death that comports with its valiant life, not a long, lingering death from a wound. Aside from accurate shooting, your stalk is the thing that counts, and it is important to remember that the elk is not like the moose,

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who will cut and run from his mate and travel twenty miles in a day. The elk is the sheik of a harem. He stakes out a chunk of territory, runs up his standard, and invites the gals to watch him whip any guy who can reach as high as he can on the flag-pole. In the event of disturbance, he will be around the same neighborhood the next day, or the next day after that, because he has a band to look after. If you scare him in your stalk without shooting at him, he likely will meet you the following day within throwing distance of where you first saw him. If you scare him away with rifle fire, it may be weeks before you see him again, or it may be never. And, for the elk, that may be a good thing.

*Only one, brother. Only one, please!*



## 6 : *Antelope*



MY FATHER, who was an ardent sportsman, told us we would perhaps see antelope out of the train window when we emigrated from the Canadian prairies to the Pacific Coast. He was right. Nearing the Rocky Mountains, my brother Pat and I saw our first band of antelope. They were racing along the prairie parallel to the fast passenger tram, their rapid, smooth strides consuming almost fifty miles of open country an hour, the speed at which the train was travelling. They were not racing between the train and a fence, but were out on the free stony prairie, racing the train, it seemed, for fun, not from being panic-stricken, just keeping ahead of the cars, doing it easily. How long we watched them, I don't know, but perhaps ten minutes, until they hit down a gully in the broad expanse of country and apparently swerved away from sight. I dreamed of antelope hunting for years after that, but antelope became scarce, the seasons remained closed, and the money on hand to go on such a hunt never quite amounted to enough to make it possible. Of recent years, the antelope has come back strong in many localities, notably Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, New Mexico, and Arizona, and in both Montana and Wyoming the tourist can see them from the highways in many sections. I have seen many pronghorns while crossing the country, and it is a heart-warming sight. The antelope is a remarkable big-game animal.

The hunter is not the only one whom the remarkable prong-

horn has confused, for he has naturalists so nonplussed that he has been given a full family name of his own, namely *Antilocapridae*, the one and only of his kind. Actually, some authorities place him in the family *Bovidae*, of the oxen and sheep. He isn't a deer. When you think of it, the irony of the situation becomes apparent: our mountain goat is an antelope, and our antelope is a sheep, and the meat of the pronghorn tastes like whitetail venison. It doesn't really matter if *Antilocapra americana*, the pronghorn, American antelope, or prongbuck, as he is variously called, is pigeonholed. The main desideratum is that he be carefully propagated and protected for future hunting and abundance, as is the case in the state of Montana.

Perhaps the remarkable coloration and the even more remarkable vision of the pronghorn are the more outstanding of his many interesting attributes. On the upper parts the coat of the animal is a rich golden tan, verging under the belly to pure white, with white cross bands at the neck and shoulder, black mane and, on the male animal, black spot on the side of the head, and in both sexes black on the top of the head and nose. Add a pillow of white at the rump and you have the strange colors which give the antelope, at a distance, the appearance of being a quite large animal. As a matter of fact, the pronghorn buck is not large. A big specimen will seldom weigh more than 110 pounds, live weight. Such an animal will stand three feet at the shoulder, with a length of approximately four feet. Just a nice size for a good man to pack off the range.

Antelope vision is, as indicated, phenomenal, thus accounting for many stories of antelope perception. These stories are not the results of chance development. The eye of a pronghorn is almost as large as that of an elephant, and no doubt much more clear-visioned. In cleaning out a head for mounting, I was amazed to find the eye long and conical like a telescope, instead of round, as in most animals, a perfect mechanism for long-range sight. The antelope relies upon its eyes for protection, much like the mountain goat and sheep, and if you have seen the antelope you can be sure it has seen you, even if you are looking through binoculars. It has been said by old antelope

hunters, with a degree of seriousness, that if you are using eight-power glasses in an attempt to make out if that hump on the horizon is an antelope, the pronghorn buck has already been sizing up your cartridge belt and counting your shells.

Hunters of this animal utilize its keen vision and its natural curiosity in order to shoot it. Pronghorns are curious by nature. One amusing story told me by Sid Tabutt about an Alberta antelope hunt is perhaps illustrative. His friend, an old Ozark mountain man who had somehow ended up in a run-down, unproductive farm near the Canadian Rockies, loved to hunt antelope more than anything in the world. He took Sid out one morning in an old rattle-trap, haywire Model-T Ford, and drove aimlessly across the stony prairie. Wondering what it was all about, Sid kept his counsel, even though the excursion didn't seem to conform to his idea of hunting. Finally, on the rolling, dipping prairie, the old Ozark hunter spotted a lone pronghorn buck. Immediately the old crate in which they were riding started to bump over the prairies in a clattering, headlong dash.

As soon as the antelope ran from sight behind a rolling ridge, the old man turned the ignition off and stopped the car. Sid asked him why. The mountaineer said, "Wait and see!" Sid did, watching the top of the ridge from which the pronghorn had disappeared. Sure enough, about five minutes later, the pronghorn's head appeared over the top of the ridge, and soon it stood staring at the still form of the car. The old man started up the bucket of bolts and ran full speed after the disappearing antelope. The buck disappeared in the dip of another ridge. The owner shut off the ignition and stopped the car in the depression. The pronghorn came back and again looked curiously over the ridge at the car.

This performance was repeated about ten times, with flying dashes across the stony prairie, sudden stops in the depressions, and returns by the curious buck. Sid suddenly noticed that the pronghorn was getting closer each repeat. He asked about this. The answer was typical of the Ozark Mountains.

"Confoosin' him!"

Sid wondered about that. Who was "confoosed" besides him?

The antelope could take off any time and so far outdistance the old car in five minutes that it would take the broken-down conveyance a day to catch up. However, he sat waiting patiently for developments. On the fifteenth repetition of the tactic, the old man told him to get out of the car and head for the top of the roll as quickly as he could, but not to cross over. Sid did so, walking not too fast, so that he was not out of breath. Sure enough, as he sat down just below the summit and waited, the pronghorn came up on top of the ridge to stand looking at the car. He nailed the big buck at about one hundred and fifty yards.

Sid laughs when he tells about the expedition. The Ozarker never explained at any time, but treated the maneuver as a natural one to carry out when a man's legs were getting old. Sid explains it this way. The antelope had seen them first a mile away in their car. It had lit out for cover, sensing that a man couldn't shoot through a hill. When the chase was not continuous, the pronghorn's curiosity got the better of him. He wondered what had happened to his adversary, and wanting to place his location, had to climb back to the top of the rolling hill in order to make it out. All he saw was a stationary car. When he had identified it and had seen it start again, he chased off. Coming back each time, he saw a stopped car at the bottom of the roll, not something chasing him. Each time he ran the thing followed him, but never tried to catch him. Each time he had to satisfy his curiosity at a little closer proximity. The last time Sid was in position to shoot. As the old man said, "confoosin'."

The usual practice of hunting antelopes in a car is a bad one. It was responsible for the earlier decimation of the big herds. I have had hunters tell me how they figured antelope hunting in cars down to a science. They would take out after a herd with about four guns to a car. For the first half-hour they would push along at about thirty miles an hour, increase the speed up to forty, then to forty-five miles an hour. Pronghorns in such a chase are inclined to circle back to the original spot from which they took flight. As they continued to run, the spirals would decrease in size. Eventually, I am told, the antelopes, with only

one car chasing them, will begin to run in quite tight circles, tiring quickly now at the high speeds.

When they have reached this stage of exhaustion antelopes will stop, if the car will, regardless of its proximity. The hunters then all get out and blaze the animals down at short distance. A stinking thing to be done in the name of sport, I may say. Moreover, meat from any animal run to exhaustion is rank and fit for consumption only by the hyenas who would hunt in such fashion.

There are ways of taking antelope which give a hunter a big thrill. You won't find the pursuit of antelope anything like deer hunting. In the first place, you usually see only one buck deer, or at most, four to five deer of all sexes in a day. With antelope to hunt you may see twenty, fifty, or even one hundred between dawn and sunset. However, you may not get close to even one band. Shooting is most often at not less than two hundred yards, within full view of the animal, without even a tree for partial cover. The antelope is a wild plains animal, and until recent hunting pressures drove herds to the hills, individuals and herds would avoid brush country. In fact an antelope doesn't seem to like to be in any position where it cannot see for at least a thousand yards in any direction. It uses the brow of a hill as cover from the pursuer.

Rus Bartley, who was brought up in Saskatchewan, told me how he and his father used to combine to hunt the animals. As soon as they had spotted a group of pronghorns, his father would pick out a shallow ravine in which to station Rus. Rus would head back toward the ravine, away from the pronghorns, while his dad would head off in the other direction, at an angle to the antelope. Bartley Senior would circle a long way out, and the antelope would turn to drift toward the ravine. Apparently it is their habit to run a ravine in the downhill direction. Rus would be waiting in the hollow.

He laughingly tells how, in his first experience with this stratagem, he acted according to his father's instructions, except for one thing. His dad advised him to lie down in the grass completely out of sight, which he did, also, to rise up only when the

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running hooves were so loud that he thought they would run over the top of him. Rus waited until he heard what he thought was a herd of elephants almost rushing over him. He rose up with wildly beating heart to find the six antelope were not farther away than seventy yards, going like the milltails of hell. They swerved, without missing a beat in their flight, and sailed over the edge of the ravine so fast he couldn't get a gun on them. However, he was later able to take them by this means at twenty to thirty yards, which would be a good running shot at any deer at full speed.

When crossing through Montana, I twice tried my hand at stalking antelope with a camera. A highly rewarding and harmless form of sport, by the way. The country was rough hewn, characterized by broken terrain, with several mesas reaching off to the horizon. I had seen several bands of the fawn-hued animals from the car, and when I saw a particularly good-looking stretch of country, with hummocks and boulders on it, I started away from the car at an angle from the herd of six. It was in early September, the day hot and clear, with a heat mirage that made the pronghorns' legs look twice as long as normal when they stopped feeding on top of a rise to look at me. I hadn't gone fifty yards from the car, yet they saw me from a distance of eight hundred yards when I got out. One of the does put her head down to feed, and at the same time a big buck pronghorn rose to the top of a hummock to watch me carefully. The other members of the band started over the ridge, and the feeding doe soon followed them.

As I cut across the badland, occasionally looking back, very seldom looking directly at the pronghorn buck, he began to move off and down into the arroyo behind the hump. I then started directly toward the hump, with the cross-wind taking my scent away from the band. When I reached the top of the hump, I looked up and saw what I thought to be another herd almost half a mile away. They were gone like a wraith into mist. They must have been the herd I had first seen, because there were the same number and sexes, and not another pronghorn showed anywhere inside the horizon.

As they seemed to be heading for a mesa top about a mile away, I moved casually across the barren country toward the mesa. About an hour later, as I topped the big, flat, boulder-strewn plain, I saw the six animals again, at about the original distance of eight hundred yards. I had a quick look before any of them raised his head, and saw a large hump of rock off to the south of them, at only two hundred yards. I figure that, if I could get that cover between them and me, I could sneak right up to them.

I worked down the edge of the mesa for half an hour, or until I estimated that the rocks would be between us. Raising my head, I saw I had overshot my mark: the animals were on the opposite side of the clump. Brother, was it hot! I was sweating with both anticipation and heat. I worked my way back to a position which seemed to be right behind the boulder from my quarry, took a deep breath, and poked my head casually above the rim. There were no antelope in sight, so I had to take a chance. Slowly I worked my way up behind the rocky upthrust.

The going was tough—crawling—and twice I heard the slithering and saw the dust trail of a big snake, in neither instance being able to identify the reptile, which didn't help my feeling of security at all. Several times I was tempted to circle out to make sure that the antelope band was still there, but resisted the impulse. I had made a fair amount of noise, which actually sounded thunderous in my own ears—a rolling boulder, the scraping of clothing on brush or stubby cactus, and the more than normal noise of breathing.

Reaching the rocky upthrust, I climbed slowly to the top, hoping, hoping. Raising the top of my head over a rock, I saw a big pronghorn buck looking right at me. I had enough sense not to duck quickly. The animals were only two hundred yards away, their striped necks a clean target for a rifle but nothing for a camera lense. The rest of the band put their heads up as the pronghorn buck coughed explosively and moved his front feet nervously. I moved into view, realizing I might as well have a good look. The buck coughed out four short barks and the band lit out over that dusty mesa like a barrage of rockets. In

thirty seconds they were just a rising spot of dust on the rough land. I didn't get a picture, but I could have shot the buck in the first ten seconds, even though he had caught the slow movement of my head coming up over the rocks.

At two hundred yards in silent air, a deer would have heard a man easily, and if it had been as shy as these antelopes were, it would have been a long way off and well hidden. I don't think the antelope's powers of hearing compare with those of most of the deer family, but that is only a personal opinion based on one or two meager brushes with them.

In Montana, while hunting with a party of four, I saw some interesting action. We drove out early one morning into some very bad, stony country. Two of the other hunters sighted a band immediately, going after it on foot. The other hunter, Jimmy Campbell, wanted to look over a long rise in the opposite direction alone. Frankly, I like to hunt alone, which permits me to hide my mistakes and keeps me from blaming them on anyone else. The situation left me two directions in which to travel, neither of which I would have freely chosen. However, downwind from the band which the two hunters were stalking was a shallow gully which curved away from the direction of the herd. I set out for it.

As I was the novice in the party and would be blamed for any mistakes, I figured it might be a good idea to cross the gully and over the distant hummock, then go on to the other side to sit and await developments. With two parties going in opposite directions, I figured that, by being downhill from the herd of antelope, I might get in a shot as the game circled. About half an hour later, I sat on the opposite side of the hump, with my back against the side of a big rock. Being downwind, I had a smoke because it was chilly. Nothing happened for more than an hour. I saw a lone prongbuck break out over the rolling prairie near some stunted trees, but he was almost seven hundred yards away, moving nervously.

Although there was a scope on my .303 Ross rifle, it didn't seem possible I could judge the distance correctly, inasmuch as the sights were in at three hundred yards. If I shot and missed,



it might spoil a stalk for the other fellow. I put the glass down reluctantly. What the hell! I couldn't hold steady enough anyway; the animal was bobbing all over my glass, and, besides, it was hardly any larger than my post at that distance. Also, it seemed he had seen my movement and was shying off to a greater distance.

It was a good thing I held my fire. Two shots sounded suddenly across the prairie, one a sharp report, the other low. I figured it was the .250-3000 Savage of Ben's, in the first instance, and the old Winchester .38-55 with which one of the older men was hunting, in the second. There was a total of six shots after that, all from the .250-3000 Savage, and I guessed that Ben, who was shooting it, had missed and was shooting at the running band. As it turned out later, that was it. In the meantime, I sprawled out on the down-slope of the roll, hoping the animals would choose the vale in which I lay for a run to cover. Feeling like a sneak, I put my gun to my shoulder and lay quite still, in prone position.

It seemed hardly a minute after the shots, which were at least a mile away, before six antelope streaked full tilt at the head of the shallow roll in which I lay. A moment after they hit the rise, they slowed down. I prayed for them to stop, but they didn't. They came down the dip so quickly that it was a job to keep my telescope on them. At three hundred yards they stopped suddenly, and I guessed that they had seen my prone figure on the slope and would now swerve up and over the hill. They started to move slowly, looking back up the shallow dip and cocking their heads from side to side.

Suddenly, the larger pronghorn buck at the rear put up his head and looked directly at me. I knew then it was two hundred and fifty yards or nothing—not a bad shot. Shivering inwardly against the fear of missing him, I got my finger to squeeze off front on the shoulder. The buck took a sudden leap sideways with the rest of the herd. He rocked back on a strange angled jump and went straight up in the air, then hit the short grass on his front shoulder. I heard the *whumphh* of the air coming out of his lungs.

He struggled to his feet, but his hind quarters folded under him suddenly, and there was no doubt he was a gone buck. Slowly he rolled over on his side and started to kick. The others of the band lit out hell-bent. I walked up to the pronghorn slowly, gun ready, just in case he was only creased and his spine not broken. He lay still as I approached. Blood was puddling under his sleek, stiff-haired shoulders.

Bending over him, I saw the copper-jacketed bullet had caught him high on the ribs behind the shoulder, and had been deflected upward, breaking the spine at the joints, going out the other side with a two-inch hole. It had cut the spinal artery and pumped the blood out of him through the hole. The horns were not trophy for the book, just a nice fourteen-inch pair of prongs with a good outward curve, but they were pretty enough for me. The animal weighed ninety-eight pounds, a good-sized buck.

Few men can afford to choose freely the rifle which they wish to hunt with, but for myself, I like both my regular guns, the 303 British caliber and the 7-mm Mauser caliber, both of which are a little heavy for antelope unless a light-weight bullet is used with a fast load. The grizzly or moose loads, using bullets from 175 to 250 grains, will smash up an antelope, whitetail, or mule-deer shoulder or haunch, so that very little meat is saved from it. A bullet weight from 87 grains (in .250-3000 Savage or .257 Remington-Roberts) to 130 grains is the kind to use on pronghorns, a rifle from the class of .250-3000 Savage, 257 Remington-Roberts, or .270 Winchester caliber, to the .300 Savage (using light-weight bullet) is good. The flatter the trajectory of the bullet (and it should be a good, light bullet), the better for antelope shooting. The animals are seldom shot under two hundred yards, and often a good rifleman will rely on his ability to fire accurately up to six hundred yards. The latter distance is plenty of shooting on so small a target, and almost hopeless if the animal is moving.

Unlike searching for deer, you don't look for the tracks or the dung of antelope. You look for antelope. The area they inhabit is usually open and flat, or gently rolling, with a minimum

of brush cover. People in the district will usually know where the bands hang out, and as a rule can be trusted to tell you where they are. Expect to walk over long areas, and be prepared with glasses or at least a good scope on your rifle. Light, warm shoes and fairly heavy clothing are good-sense equipment, and a compass is good medicine if you get caught in rolling country with no landmarks. Be prepared to be cautious, and *patient*, in your stalk, and use every mite of cover the land affords you. Don't make any sudden movements, and always move at an angle towards the game, seldom facing or looking directly at it. Listen for the antelope's peculiar bark, which sounds like a sudden escapement of air from a tire hose. The sound will often tell you that the antelope band you are stalking is right over the hump ahead of you, waiting to see you before it moves off. Several times I've got up to fifty yards from such bands, using a land hump. But you have to shoot within the first five seconds at such times. They don't usually wait any longer.

Antelope are curious about strange objects, and it is repeatedly told in the lore about them that they used to come almost up to the canvas-covered wagons on the prairies to see what these rolling things were. In that period, the pronghorn was almost as plentiful on the plains as the buffalo. Hunters often used a now well-known trick of waving a white piece of cloth, a hat or a gun, or a coat to attract them. I have heard of men lying down on their backs and waving their feet in the air, to decoy them. There are many tricks, only a couple of which I have tried, but one naturalist says that a blind with posts around it, bearing white flags at the corners, attracted them. Yet another zoologist put on a white sheet with eyeholes slit in it and claimed to have walked right up to an only faintly nervous band. Still other informants say that getting off a horse and walking behind the rump confuses the animals, because they can't identify the extra pair of legs as being part of the bronco. It is up to the taste and ideas of the hunter how he does it, if he is lucky enough to get in on an open season for antelope. But he had better shoot half a box of shells away in target practice,

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because the pronghorns are cagey, and they have become justly distant to mankind and his tricks.

As a trophy, an antelope head is one of the most beautiful of all heads when mounted, and the meat is larrupin'. Perhaps because of their rather nervous temperament and disposition to run, antelope don't usually fatten up much. The meat, however, is juicy, as if from prime, sweet marbling of fat in the muscle tissue. It tastes very much like venison, and a roast saddle or haunch is entirely delicious. Served with baked yams or sweet potatoes, green peas, and not too highly seasoned (it is seldom very gamey), it is hard to beat. If you get fed up with stalking over uninteresting country after pronghorns, a casual thought in the direction of your forthcoming roast will help to push you along.

## 7 : Caribou



MY FIRST SIGHT of caribou was between Skagway, Alaska, and Whitehorse in the Yukon Territory. Like the rest of the passengers on the small riverboat, I just stared at them in wonder. The herd was swimming the river in a wide V-shaped formation containing altogether about seventy-five animals. Frankly, I thought they were elk until one of the deck hands told me they were the world-famed caribou. Having seen deer swim many times, I wasn't prepared for the buoyancy of the swimming caribou herd. They seemed to be almost a quarter out of the water, quite at home in the fairly swift current, and moving at a good pace across stream. Actually, they do swim much higher in the water than deer, and the northern Indian name for them means "deer of the swamp." The reasons for their buoyancy are several, including their exceptionally thick, and almost waterproof, coat; their tendency to develop a layer of fat down the backbone and rump; finally, the caribou is equipped with a broad foot, which would give it much the same advantage a man gets from the rubber flippers or paddle feet so common on modern-day beaches. These caribou of the north did not seem frightened, or even nervous because of the boat. On reaching the opposite shore, they moved off slowly toward cover. The woodland caribou, however, is not usually so unwary of mankind.

There are two very distinct types of caribou (*Rangifer*), the

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Woodland Caribou and the Barren Ground Caribou, with a third type, a variation of the Woodland Caribou, known as the Newfoundland Caribou, which is not really deserving of a division. The Woodland Caribou is split by naturalists into Richardson Caribou, Mountain Caribou, Osborn Caribou, Woodland Caribou, Peary Caribou, Stone Caribou, Dawson Caribou, Alberta Caribou, and Newfoundland Caribou, which in some cases is like categorizing a Texan as an entirely different breed from an Oklahoman. The variations in most of these subspecies is mostly due to pelage coloration and size. However, the caribou of the extreme North, or, generally speaking, Barren Ground Caribou, are definitely smaller, with a tendency to a lighter coloration of the pelage, and long, slender horns.

A general description would fit all caribou into such an easy identification that even the tyro could be sure of recognizing them. The horns, which resemble those of the elk in size, have a definite tendency to palmate at the extremities, with a rather peculiar brow horn, an offshoot from the main beam with a straight up-and-down twist and exceptional palmation sometimes mistakenly called a snow tine. The feet have a very extreme breadth for carrying the animals across snow and swamps, and the dewclaws are dropped down almost to the same depth as the main hoof. These ancillary hooves show plainly in a track left by the animal in soft ground, and are the cause of the peculiar clicking sound of the animal when in motion, as if the caribou were equipped with built-in castinets. The neck and shoulders of the bull and cow alike are lighter in color than the rest of the body, as if a shawl had been thrown over the shoulders in order to ward off the chill of their habitat. The general body pelage is light fawn to almost white (depending on the season), or grading to lighter shades from a deep brown that is almost black. When the Woodland Caribou is ranging farther south from its normal habitat, the darkness of its coat is more extreme, the shoulder cape more pronounced by comparison.

Actually, the range of the caribou is in the empty stillnesses of the Northland, almost as if the Maker had set bands of cattle out for the Eskimo and the Northern Indian. The herds of late

years have become decimated, yet the caribou can still be seen massed in migratory herds which will take two or three days to pass a given point. At this migratory period, most of the winter meat is killed by the citizens of the North, and the frozen carcasses used all winter long for the table. It is a good thing for the caribou that, with this tendency to herd migration, it lives in the frozen North. Farther south it could not survive the invited slaughter. The killing of them is not sport, it is merely slaughter of the cattle of the wild. I remember a bush pilot, Harry Akeroyd, telling me of being snowbound in his plane in the northern Yukon Territory and being forced to live with the Indians.

Harry was not a man who took kindly to violence. His tendency on capturing a fly was to take it outside and release it. While he was waiting for a break in the weather, the caribou bands started to drift by the Indians' shacks. The snow was soft and powdery, and a good deal of excitement among the natives became evident. They told him the winter "meat" was arriving. When he saw the men take up their guns, he decided to see what it was all about. Following them to the edge of the lightly frozen lake, he saw the bands of caribou coming down the shore. The ice was not strong enough to hold the big animals, so they were forced to pass the spot chosen by the tribesmen for ambush. A herd of some one hundred animals came down the side of the lake, and when half of them had gone past the Indians, the latter opened up with .30-30's, .38-55's, 12-gauge shotguns, any kind of weapon that was handy. The result made him feel sick at his stomach.

Bulls, cows, fawns went crashing down in a scrambling mêlée. The animals kept coming after the lead cow, picking their way around the previously fallen animals, hardly noticing them, speeding up the pace to a fast trot, but never turning back. It was as if they were marching upon some predetermined fortress and were bound to take it at all costs. The cost was heavy, and so was the work of butchering and cleaning out the kill of at least twenty-five animals. Harry said he had seen enough of it before it was half over and went back to his cabin until the

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rifle shots stopped. He then returned to help with the work. And, he says, the Indians later used every scrap of the animals for some household economy. The fat off the rump seemed to be a special delicacy and was stored away for future use in cooking. The hides were prepared for tanning, and the entrails were put to various uses. Although two other herds passed the spot before he came out of the country, he says he saw only an isolated caribou shot. The Indians had taken what they wanted and consequently left the balance for the next needed kill. The white man could learn a lot about conservation from such habits.

In the top curve of the Big Bend Highway in central northeastern British Columbia, I saw my first Woodland Caribou and was amazed at the beauty of the animals. Three of the big deer came down the side of a mountain ridge as we were eating lunch on the side of the road. At first glance, as with my earlier experience with Barrenland Caribou, I thought they were elk until the sun hit the light-colored front shoulders of a bull. The animal was magnificent in appearance but rather slouching in gait. Since Ken White and I had a prearranged appointment in the Rocky Mountains that we could not avoid, we simply watched the animal move slowly along the ridge then disappear into the green timber. My heart was filled with disappointment. The bull looked big and was carrying what appeared to be an enormous rack.

Two years later, in the same area, I shot my one and only caribou unintentionally. Frank Smith, another ardent hunter, and I drove into the area and camped on a river with which neither of us was familiar. We had been told by some Indians living south of the area that caribou quite often came down the river near to a point near its mouth. Actually, we were after mountain sheep and moose, and caribou did not seem a likely possibility.

We pulled up the narrow, winding road for several miles, made camp at the base of a high mountain, and got ready for the climb the following morning. Frank is one of those agreeable guys in the morning hours. He will consent to anything *verbally*. You say, "Time to get up!" He says, "Sure." You say, "How about



lighting the fire?" He says, "Sure." You say, "The tent is on fire." He says, "Sure." And he never even opens his eyes. About half an hour later, when the coffee is boiling and the bacon is frying, he comes sleepily out of the tent and says, "Sure. Sure smells good. Whyn't y' wake me? I'd a' got breakfast." Then he sits down on his prat with his hand out, his eyes closed, and waits until you stick a hot plate into his palm. Oh, what-the-hell! You know the kind. You can't help but like them. Nothing ever fazes them: good going, bad going, come rain, come shine.

I put a hot plate in Frank's outstretched hand as he dozed on his haunches beside the fire. It was chilly with October frost, the air was clear and sharply heady, the forest silent and peaceful with the blue of early dawn. It was silent until the plate hit his hand. He let out an Indian war whoop, fumbled the plate to the ground and looked up at me with an injured stare.

"You bastard!" he said thoughtfully. "*You bastard!*"

"Thanks," I commented. "And you're the guy who's going to shoot a bighorn this morning before nine o'clock."

"Sure," he said, and filled his mouth with two eggs at once. "I bet you ten bucks I shoot one before noon, an' you don't."

"I'll take it," I agreed, "and another ten you don't get any game before I do. Not counting grouse."

"Shake, my pal. Shake!" he grinned.

For the first hour we hunted together. The steep rise up the fairly well timbered slopes was good going, but not open enough for anything other than deer. We saw two does and a big fawn coming up from the river along a ridge about three hundred yards from us. Frank sat down and watched them. I nodded to him to come on. The edge of timberline was just ahead. Frank shook his head.

"Gonna wait for that buck to follow them," he said.

"You mean you'll stoop to that for ten bucks?" I asked disgustedly.

"Hell, we'll be here a week," he half-smiled. "I could do with a feed of deer liver. I'll let you off the ten bucks on this one."

There was no use arguing with Frank. I knew when he started out on the upgrade he wouldn't reach the sheep country

that day. He was too lackadaisical after the big breakfast I'd purposely filled him up with. Oh yeah! For ten bucks I'll be a wily bastard, too. But I hadn't figured on the chance of deer cropping up. I was tempted to sit it out with him.

Somewhere a long way off, I heard the unmistakable bugle of a bull moose. It made me itchy to get going. About an hour later I followed a deep cleft in the shale cliff into a basin between two rimrock ridges. There was a small creek running out of it and it looked good. The growth in the basin was mostly small juniper, and on the rimrock tops I saw large patches of snow on the north side. It was a surprise to find a quite level swampy area with very heavy green growth around it, country one would likely find bordered with heavy timber in the lower area. Just below one of the patches of snow I saw several white dots that looked like mountain goat. Because I had no field glasses or scope on my rifle, I couldn't be sure. They were at least a mile and half away. I was disappointed. It didn't seem likely that bighorns would be in the same area.

For the next half hour I swung around the bowl toward them, and then found my vision cut off by a sharp, uprooted cliff of rimrock. The country looked good on the other side, open and green, so I sweated around the basin toward it. As I crossed a level edge of a slide, I saw hundreds of pockets dug out by grizzly bears rooting, which made me wary of any that might be close. The slide was riddled with great gorges from snowslides pushing down into the basin, making it difficult to see great distances. At one spot, as I looked over some big tracks with puddles of water in them, I idly thought they were strange looking grizzly tracks, but figured they had silted in on the bottom and become disfigured with weather.

Suddenly, a light movement caught the edge of my eye, and I peered closely down into the marshy ground of the round valley. Frankly, I was hoping for a moose after having heard the bugle earlier. The golden gleam of a big chest startled me. Beside it I saw another big light-colored chest. My hands shook as if I'd seen a ghost. I tried to pull the safety over, but my sweaty thumb slipped off the knurled metal. I just stood and

stared There were two bull caribou, a small one and a big one, and only three hundred yards away.

The big bull had its head down motionless, as if it were chewing its cud or just staring at the ground. The young bull was looking up the grade toward me. I tried to sit down without making any movement. The suddenness of the sight gave me the worst case of buck fever I had had in years. My knees were shaking, my hands cold and clammy, and my thoughts swirled around in a dizzy whirlpool. Were caribou in season? Was I in a game sanctuary? Could I hit one at three hundred yards with iron sights and jellied nerves? The young bull started to move restlessly and the older bull put his head up.

The rack coming up into the bright sunlight shook all the nerves out of me. It was a lovely head with distinct palmation at the tips and a good brow spade. The big animal's coat was a deep, glistening brown along the back, set off by the yellow mantle of his cape. He took a step after the young bull, which was now angling upward from me. I watched him move, put the sights behind his shoulder, and was just about to squeeze. Suddenly I realized the animals would hit a deep fissure in the slide about two hundred yards away and probably come up to it in an effort to get over the ridge. I waited. They were both heading upward, not too cagey, just moving away from me upwind. I waited until they began to drop over the edge of the fissure, then trotted upward toward it.

Both of the animals were out of sight and a surge of misgiving assailed me. Hell! I could have hit a caribou at three hundred yards! What was the matter with me! Brother! I told myself, you've got a real case of buck fever! I broke out of the hedge of juniper and up to the edge of the deep snow wash. The fissure was about four times as wide as it had looked from below, and the caribou were not in sight. I felt a cold sensation in the pit of my solar plexus. Sol Smart guy, Cramond! The boob of the bushes! Let 'em get away from an easy shot! I damn near bit my lip in two. Ten bucks shot, too, because Frank had probably taken the buck he was waiting for. I cradled my gun in my arm, eying the side of the hill in the distance. Somewhere over there,

about half a mile away, I'd probably see my caribou saunter over the ridge I sat down dejectedly.

There was a clicking sound, like two rocks hitting each other, just below me. Damned if the two bulls weren't coming up behind me just as peacefully as a couple of cows, right in the open! How I'd missed seeing them I don't know, except that I'd come up fast and had been looking straight ahead. I just raised up my sights, and at one hundred yards (downhill paces) I set under the muzzle, right on the chest of the bigger bull. He saw the movement of the rifle barrel at the split second, and at the same instant the young bull reared close to him to turn around and go down the slope. At the sudden movement, the big bull jumped forward right into the 303 slug.

He went down on his haunches, his front feet buckling in the slide, then turned broadside in an effort to run downhill I guess I was excited. I drove another fast shot in behind the shoulder and there was a deep *whummph* out of his lungs. He rolled over on the slide, his horns clicking on the boulders, mud flying off his kicking big feet. He caught in the crook of a gnarled old cedar and never moved again.

When I got back to camp, Frank had a silly grin on his face. He was frying the breasts of a couple of ptarmigan in butter and looking sheepish.

"Thought you might be hungry for game," he smiled.

"Yeh How about the ten bucks?" I snorted

"Oh *We* called that off," he grinned easily. "You didn't shoot anything anyway Never heard a thing."

I held out my knapsack.

"Like some caribou liver braised on toast?" I said belligerently.

"Oh, sure," he grinned "Shall I bring out the champagne and caviar?"

I tossed down the knapsack and opened it up. Frank's eyes bulged almost as much as mine had when I first saw the two bulls. The next three days we spent packing the animal out. It was a big bull, going well over six hundred pounds, and we both agreed it was as large as most bull elk. The rack measured forty-

seven inches on one beam and forty-five inches on the other, not a record but nevertheless a fully acceptable trophy.

In reality, the shooting of that caribou is very typical of hunting Woodland Caribou generally. I had no right to it, except that I was in the country at the same time the caribou happened to be there. A hunter can spend all his life in country in which caribou are known to come, and yet never see an animal at all. They migrate long distances in accordance with the weather. When they do, they are apt to be seen anywhere as they head in either a northerly or a southerly direction, following the easiest ground to their winter or summer feed.

Known as "swamp deer" by the Indians, they usually seem to keep on the main watersheds, swimming the rivers whenever it suits them, rather than going the long way around. Trappers in the North always know caribou crossings and the approximate time of the year or season at which they can be expected. Trappers, probably better even than naturalists, know their habits and obscure ways. The main reason is that many caribou are, and have been, shot for trap bait as well as for winter meat. One old trapper, whom I remember by name as Pete Johanssen, said he had shot many caribou when trapping in Yukon Territory. He was of the opinion that they were very regular in their habits—that you just had to be in the right place at the right time and sit there. The caribou would eventually come to you, and you could shoot any animal you thought you'd like. He stated there was no use attempting to follow them, even in heavy snow, for, as he put it, "A caribou, she got four snowshoe. One on each foot. He go across frozen lake like he got spike shoes. No use to follow. More come by soon enough."

He stated that they did not seem to feed very much while they were travelling, but you'd see the odd tree in the path that had been cleaned of moss up as high as the animals could reach, as they passed on their way migrating to winter grounds. He said also that the young heifers were the best eating, and you could pick them out by their smaller horns and lighter weight. (Both bull and cow caribou carry antlers.) Perhaps because Pete had eaten so much caribou in his years in the North as a

trapper and prospector, he didn't think very much of the meat, preferring moose ten to one

For myself, I couldn't see much difference in the texture of caribou meat as compared to that of elk, and the flavor is very similar, but there is more fat covering the muscle tissue. I liked it, but I go along with Pete. Give me moose if the animal is prime.

The Woodland Caribou is a big deer, comparing favorably in size with the elk. It can be killed with almost any gun if it is not shy. The animals are curious, and the bulls in rutting season either courageous or anxious for connubial satisfaction. They will trot right up to a string of horses, and under such circumstances could be effectively put down with a slug from a shotgun. However, a caribou is still a big animal and should not be shot at a distance with anything but a heavier caliber gun, with a fast bullet. In my opinion, anything in the same class with a .30-'06, .270, .303 British, or 7-mm. Mauser (175-grain bullet) and better is a solid enough killer for caribou. All big-game animals will at times pack away more lead than would seem normal, but that is usually because of inaccurate shooting caused by excitement or a fast moving animal. The caribou will carry a misplaced slug as well as any animal, but when hit directly in the chest cavity with one good slug in its lungs or heart, it will stay down

The tracks are unmistakable due to the huge foot and the almost always present dewclaw marks in back. I have never been able to distinguish caribou dung from that of elk, and because caribou do not seem to take up any residence for a long period, differing in this respect from elk, mule deer, and even moose, the droppings are not profuse over any considerable area. No doubt a good bushman would know them instantly. You can reasonably expect deer, moose, elk, to be in the same vicinity they were on the previous day, but it seems that men who have killed caribou are in unanimous agreement that you see them one day, perhaps in abundance, but the next there won't be a caribou within twenty miles

In country such as the world-famous Cassiar District of British Columbia, which is a natural range for caribou, it is

normal to see them almost daily, either mooching through or banded together. The Barren Ground Caribou, however, are more regular in their habits, as far as the hunter goes, and definitely move to well-known grounds in summer and winter. It is more likely that a hunter in such an area could be sure of going out and taking his trophy. The only advice I have on caribou is to go out with a hope in your heart and a prayer in your soul, and if you don't get one, don't put it down to not being a good hunter. Just put it down to the vagaries of the caribou's habits. When you do bag one, you can expect it to put all other heads in your collection to shame. The antlers have unusual symmetry, great length of beam, heavy palmation, and the frontal shovel gives them a beauty from any angle. Unfortunately, you aren't likely to get much meat out, owing to the warmth of the weather at the time you go after them and the great distances the kill usually has to be shipped.

The bull Woodland Caribou is for the sportsman the strictest form of trophy, and you might get yours by the sheerest form of good luck.



## 8 : *Mountain Sheep*

THERE IS no doubt that you have been a way, way up there when you have shot a mountain sheep, or bighorn. When you get to the top of the mountain, then just go on up, because that's where the bighorn rams are. In this rare realm, you will have reached the top of North American big-game hunting. Few men ever take a ram mountain sheep in a lifetime of hunting, whereas almost every big-game hunter has taken elk and moose, even bears. Yes, *any* bighorn ram is a trophy. Never plentiful at any time, mountain sheep have vanished from many parts of their original range, and hunters and sportsmen have been blamed for their demise. Frankly, I don't think sportsmen are responsible nearly to the extent that sheep and cattle ranchers are. The mountain sheep is prone to die easily of domestic cattle diseases, also, the practice of driving sheep and cattle into mountain or summer pasture tends to clean out the natural range fodder of the mountain sheep. Since the mountain sheep summers even higher in the mountains, when he is driven down by winter snows, he finds his winter range gone and often infected. As he descends even lower, he reaches the territory of man, cougars, and wolves. Banding into groups, as is natural with the animals, whole herds will be "winter killed," which is often just another name for massacre by roving bands of wolves, coyotes, and cougars. Extinct in many areas but thriving in others, the mountain sheep can be saved by common-sense game laws and refuges.



This animal, our only natural sheep, of the genus *Ovis*, is represented by ten subspecies, Rocky Mountain Bighorn, Audubon Bighorn, California Bighorn, Mexican Bighorn, Gailard Bighorn, Dall Mountain Sheep, Kenai White Mountain Sheep, Fanin Mountain Sheep, Nelson Mountain Sheep, and Stone Mountain Sheep, the main varieties being due to weather, climate, and fodder, which have resulted in slightly different size and widely different pelage, or color of the coat. Actually, on seeing it, you would have no doubt of the identity of a mountain sheep's being a sheep, but the subtle subspecies' differences prescribed by naturalists are confusing even to an expert. These graceful middleweight cliff and mountain dwellers used to range from the eastern limits of the Rocky Mountains west to the Coastal Range, south to Central Mexico, and north into the Arctic Circle. California had good bands when the settlers came, and Mexico still has some good herds. While I was in Estado de Guerrero, a Mexican offered to take me to a slope of the Pacific Coast where bighorns could be shot from a boat. It wasn't my idea of hunting mountain sheep, and although I was tempted to go up the coast just to verify his statement, I didn't have sufficient time or curiosity.

Mountain sheep are very keen of vision, perhaps almost as keen as antelope. Once, while travelling in central British Columbia, I stopped at a small roadhouse to have a drink of cold pop. I happened to look up as the attendant filled my car with gasoline. My heart jumped with excitement. About half a mile away, on a sheer rising mountain, I was sure I could see a mountain sheep. I turned to the attendant.

"Isn't that a bighorn up there?" I exclaimed.

"Sure is," he replied laconically. "You must have good eyes. Like the glasses to get a better look?"

I agreed wholeheartedly. He brought the binoculars out of the store and handed them to me. As they focused upon the standing sheep, I was amazed to note that he was looking right at me. I thought for a minute it was a trick animal, stuffed and put up there for the dude tourists to look at. A moment later the sheep started up the sheer rock cliff, picking his way as if he

was walking between stones on level ground. I put the glasses down and turned to the attendant:

"He's moving off," I said.

He grinned knowingly.

"Yeh, he does that whenever glasses go on him," he said placidly. "Seems like he can count the buttons on your vest. Cagey old guy. Been around there for three years I know of. Only ever saw three of them. Been hoping they'd open this country up to shooting. Must be lots more on top of the mountain."

I don't know whether he was right, but in my own mind it was a good thing the sheep were closed to hunting in that district. The animals wouldn't have had a chance. The mountains were of the six-thousand-foot type, similar to the California ranges, dry and easy to hunt. As a matter of fact, mountain sheep usually abound at the levels at which mountain goats are found, above six thousand feet and up to twelve thousand feet.

There seems to be no valid reason why sheep and goats don't range together, but they seldom do. There seems to be a very subtle difference in their ranges. I have listened to hunters who swore that sheep chase the goats out, and others who claimed the opposite. At least one good yarn from an old trapper may explain it. He sat and watched a young billy and an old mountain goat chase a bighorn out of the country.

The bighorn ram ambled over the top of a shale ridge and down toward a swale of green grass growing in a damp snow basin from which the snow had left. The big billy just went on eating. Not, however, the young billy. The latter made a headlong rush upward at the bighorn ram, which at first put his broad head down, then jumped sideways to avoid the rush. The big billy put his head up and started up to assist the young one. The bighorn turned and headed up the shale. The young goat dashed down from his higher elevation and hit the bighorn square in the buttocks, tumbling him off his feet, in which position the nimble big billy hooked at it ineffectually with his spiked horns. The bighorn scrambled to his feet to face the big billy head on, but the smaller one hit him again in the side, bowling

him over. The mountain sheep then took off with the two goats trailing him for a short distance, neither getting close to him when he really began to climb.

This might be evidence of why the two animals don't range close together. Anyone can guess how a goat would come out alone with a bighorn, if such a battle took place. Pound for pound and build for build, they are much the same, a good-sized bighorn mountain sheep weighing up to three hundred and fifty pounds, standing three and one-half feet at the shoulders, and extending more than five feet in length. The bighorn sheep is built like a middleweight fighter, being deep-chested and big-lunged from living in rare atmosphere. Spongy, round hooves easily hold him on the narrow shelves to which he jumps, either because of fright or from choice when climbing. There is no doubt that the mountain sheep is the cleverest mountaineer of all game animals, his bouncing, almost round but muscular body taking up the terrific shock of hitting cliff faces on a sudden downward plunge. It was observed by old-timers that the mountain sheep would hit the ledges and ground on his big, wide horns to take the shock of a jump. Observations by naturalists say otherwise.

I have twice seen mountain sheep jump off a sheer cliff into a ravine, bounce once from the opposite face over to the first cliff face once more, then hit the shale slide below in what appeared to be a head-on plunge. Actually, the ram had hit the cliff faces with his forefeet, the power of his downward plunge buckling his front legs almost to the rock, in the manner of shock absorbers, and when he hit the shale, his feet dug in and his heavy head of horns almost touched the shale from the velocity of his plunge. He didn't land on his horns. I had missed him with a wild shot, and later circled to the shale in the hope of getting in another shot. Where he had hit the loose rock, there were the deep impressions of all four feet, the front two sinking at least six inches into the fairly compact mud and broken rock.

As a matter of fact, that trip checked the one and only bighorn in my game list. It was in British Columbia, in the valley of the Yalacom, which is on the eastern side of the Coastal

Range, a district once famous for its bighorns. Short of funds, as I usually am, I drove north from my home in Vancouver to the town of Lillooet. On the outskirts of the village I stopped in an Indian reservation, in search of a packer who would like to go into the mountains. The Indians said that an old man named Harry Jim who lived up one of the near-by valleys would know where the sheep were, and that he liked to go hunting. He wasn't a regular guide, but he did pack engineers and prospectors into the mountains. It appeared that he liked hunters because they paid well and sat around camp most of the time, whereas miners and engineers wanted to travel all the time. This was supposed to be a recommendation.

After finding the old man's shack, I was told he was already in the mountains but that his "cousin" would be glad to take me up the old mine trail and into the peaks. It appeared, too, that the son had never been beyond the end of the mine trail. Frankly, that didn't worry me too much, but the fact that the "cousin" appeared to be half-witted did. He was a man about twenty-five, but could have been ten years older in that elusive period of Indian maturity, and it appeared at first that he wasn't bright enough to have learned to speak English along with his own Indian tongue. As I say, it appeared that way until he began to handle horses and wrangle camp in the bush. He was a bush Indian from somewhere in the Far North, exactly where, I never did discover. Taciturn to the point of muteness, he possessed, however, a slow infectious grin. After four days in the fastness of the Yalacom Valley, I realized that I had never had a better companion. He would listen by the hour, and his only interruption was a slow, wondering smile. He actually didn't know much about game hunting, which put me on my own, just as I had wanted it. If I said, "Let's go," he would put on his big, wide-brimmed hat and follow, and I think if I'd suggested taking him to a cat house, he'd have grinned in just about the same way and followed me up the mountain expecting to find one.

On the second day out, we reached the range he called the Shulaps Mountains, which is beyond the big game preserve set

aside by the British Columbia Game Department. I asked him how he knew the range. He said he had heard his "cousin" talk about it, that it was supposed to have sheep on it. We had passed through several valleys and over one or two passes, and had seen mountain goats and deer several times, twice within shooting distance, because they are often in game preserves. But there had been no evidence of mountain sheep.

In a small valley, under a big, white-capped peak, we made camp early and rested the balance of the day. I was saddle burnt and weary, but Daniel was as happy as a pig in feathers. He cooked up a typical Indian mulligan of beans and added a fried trout I had hastily yanked out of a stream on the way up. It tasted like dinner at the Brown Derby. We slept under a lean-to of bows, and were glad to get up in the blue of the first light of morning. It had been sharp and cold for mid-September.

We started up the steep slope of the white-capped mountain with a meager breakfast in our bellies and a big lunch in the saddlebags. Daniel knew how to put it away. Three hours later we came to the top edge of the timber and tied the cayuses to strong bushes with stout ropes. There isn't any animal that likes to go home as much as a cayuse. I slipped my gun sling off my chest and filled the 7-mm. Mauser up with 173-grain Kynoch soft-nose ammunition. Daniel grinned happily and sat down comfortably.

"I watch horses," he said stoically. "Horse break rope. We walk home. Bad."

"Yeh, bad," I agreed, unhappy at the thought

It wasn't *too* bad, though. Breaking through the last of the stunted timber, I came out on some very steeply rolling ridges that looked good to me. It was the kind of country in which you are likely to see mountain goats, with which animal I was familiar. As my steps lifted me upward through some stunted juniper and cedar, a covey of seven ptarmigan wheeled out toward the patch of snow ahead, then dipped into the valley of green below. And when I say below, I really mean away down *below*. The mountains in that area reach a height of ten thousand to twelve thousand feet, rising straight up from valleys

that are almost at sea level. They are much higher than the Rocky Mountains, not in altitude, but in the distance they reach upward from ground level; absolutely tremendous! I watched the ptarmigan with a wistful sigh. I like grouse breasts braised before an open fire. The birds plummeted into a small valley, and my heart shivered. Down where they had alighted was a whole band of mountain sheep, their tan coats almost yellow in the bright sun.

Without glasses I knew they were ewes and lambs, but a little further up the valley was a big animal lying down. It was a *ram*. No doubt about it! Slowly I worked my way upward and over the top of the ridge. The distance was about seven hundred yards. As I reached the top of the ridge, I realized I had made a mistake. I had to break into full view of the big ram to come within three hundred yards of him, and I was using iron sights. Apart from that, he was on his feet like a jack-in-a-box as soon as I slithered over the top.

He started uphill at an angle from me about five hundred yards away, and I figured I'd get him by running along the rocky summit. That was where I made my mistake. In running at that altitude, with the climb behind me, I pooped out within a hundred yards. The bunch of ewes and lambs came up after him, like a flock of tame sheep being driven by an anxious dog. I trudged unhappily after them, and I saw the big head of the ram swing back to look at me. He stopped momentarily on the brown ridge of the peak. His head looked enormous, one spike twirling outward in the clear sky to what looked like record proportions. I half raised my gun as he stopped, but he spooked out down the other side with only a scant look at the ewes and lambs racing upward. As it was early, I decided to look over the country in the direction in which they had gone.

Coming to the mess of hoof-disturbed soil at the brow over which the sheep had disappeared, I was surprised to see the flock congregated in the bottom of a deep, snow-covered pan. They were milling at my sudden appearance, about three hundred yards away, the big ram just ahead of them downhill. He started running downward without a moment of hesitation,

while the flock started upward. I grinned to myself.

"That's one time you made a mistake, Old Bighorn!" I chuckled aloud. "There's nothing over the edge of that pan but rimrock."

While coming up the summit, I had seen the big cliff ledge break suddenly up from the slides, and it looked to be a three-hundred-foot sheer drop for at least a mile. I went down after the ram, sliding, slipping, spilling ahead of myself, to see him head for a rocky cleft. Sure of myself and my shooting at one hundred yards, I went straight after him. He launched himself against the side of the cliff ahead, then bounced from view over the top of the rimrock. That, I thought, was nice of him! Suicide for sure, rather than face the trusty fire of the mighty Cramond. I ran up to where I hoped to look down on his smashed carcass.

Instead, I had to fling a very hasty shot at him as I saw him leave the ledge, hit the other side, then out again into space and hit the former side, then plunge to where the rock slide came up to meet the rimrock. Actually, it was only fifty feet high there, and below was a terrifically steep slide. I drew back and forgot about him until I found the prints, after I'd circled the rimrocks and had come back along the slides.

Later that day I saw a band of rams that, as in most sheep country, usually stays apart from the ewes during summer and early fall. There were nine of them about two miles away from where I had put up the ewes. Three of them were lying in a patch of snow in order to cool off in the autumn heat, and the other six were bedded down on cool earth just below the others. To me, it was a most spectacular sight, one I had not ever hoped for. As the sun was down on the horizon and I'd neglected to pack a lunch, I left them undisturbed and started back toward Daniel. Now that I knew where they were, it was only a matter of stalking them in good time.

Daniel was sitting in almost the same position I had left him; only his head was reclined forward on his knees. He had eaten both lunches. He looked up at my approaching, knee-bending steps.

"You get meat?" he asked.

"I no get meat " I responded.

"You shoot?"

"Yeh, I shoot."

"You *no* get meat?" he repeated.

"I no get meat," I responded.

"Uuuugh!" he ejaculated.

"Yeh," I agreed. "Ugh!"

Somehow I think my brand of humor was wasted on Daniel. Instead of spit-roasted bighorn ram over a campfire that night, we had beans. They tasted good, too.

The following morning Daniel aroused me before daylight. He had lighted a big fire and the aroma of coffee boiling over into the hot coals was enticing. It appeared that, Indian-like, he had only one blanket, and in the freezing night he couldn't sleep. He poked me with the end of my hunting axe.

"You get up!" he said placidly. "We move camp up valley. More easy to get *meat* down."

I saw the train of his thought. He needed meat to keep him warm during the night, beans not having the calories for cold weather. Anything on four legs was meat to him. The fact that I was after a bighorn sheep, not deer, not goats, not ptarmigan, not elk, just didn't fit into his skull. Like any sensible Indian, he thought only in terms of meat. It looked as if I'd have to get him meat. I got up.

We had a new camp set up at the first sign of light. He followed me up the long climb with the horses, and this time I noticed he had a jam can with coffee in it, as well as the lunches. At the end of the timber he bedded down again in the sunshine, and I swear I heard a snore before I had gone one hundred yards. It was tougher going up the mountain from the new location than it was from the other position, but it was closer to the snow banks on which I had seen the nine rams. It was also necessary to scale the rimrock after a long, steep slide.

My wind was gone when I finally pulled my rifle and myself over the rim, but the view was worth it. Down below, a river I didn't know wound silvery-hued through the deep velvet green nap of the timber. Snowy peaks stretched off as far as the eye



could see, not misted even by the clouds, as they had been the day before. I heaved a big sigh and looked back up the steep slopes to the summit. My hair stood right on end.

There was a bighorn ram that looked as massive as a house not fifty yards from me. He was against the blue sky, a tan silhouette. As I swung my rifle up, he turned his head slowly toward me. The curl of his right horn was broomed off ten inches from the spiralled end.

"Dammit! Daniel's meat!"

To hell with him, the meat from that old timer would be as rank as new leather. Not even Daniel would eat that! The broken horn spoiled a head that looked like a record forty-odd-inch curl, and although I wasn't out for records, I was out to get a nice head combined with an edible sheep. The ram moved off at a sudden wary trot I stood up and scanned the hill Half a mile off I saw the snow beds, but no rams! For a minute I regretted letting the old bighorn off.

I sneaked slowly along the ridge, watching the terrain and working toward the summit, mentally kicking myself for being a big-shot hunter and letting two bighorn rams get the better of me. Looking into the depression below the snow patches, where I knew there was forage, my thoughts soared hopefully again Perhaps the rams would be still feeding down there, before coming up to rest in the snow during the heat of the day. There wasn't a ram in sight, only a patch of ewes and lambs back at the same spot where they had been the previous day. Perhaps, if I went back, I might get a shot at the large bighorn ram that had been with them the day before. Something told me better Perhaps it was the fact that a once-shot-at animal will seldom be around the same spot the next day.

Whatever it was, I reasoned my luck might be better if I climbed to the snow cap and lay in wait above the spot where I had seen the nine rams the day before. I began to climb. It was mountain scaling with a vengeance. There was a dividing ridge in the sheep range just there, a rocky upthrust that split it off from the fairly rolling land reaching to the summit. My legs were shivering with a weakness like palpitation, sweat

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soaked my Stanfields so that I almost took off my hunting shirt and left it there, where I could pick it up on the way down.

When my feet sank into the slippery snow of the summit, I was glad I hadn't. I would have to lie in snow for the wait in observation of the snow pan. Two frozen hours later, when I had given up hope of their ever coming and had just got up in order to move down the ridge toward the ewes, two rams came calmly up the slope. My body sank back into the hollow which the warmth of me had melted in the snow. As I pulled on the second animal, which had an almost completed spiral of horns, six more rams plodded into view. Shivering with excitement and chill, I waited as they all fed slowly up the slope. There were half curls, full curls, broomed off horns, and small nondescript curls. At two hundred yards I could have my pick of eight rams!

No hunter's heart was ever more full, nor his gun more unsteady I thought, "I'm shooting downhill. I must pull *high*. No, I must pull *low*! No. Just how *did* I pull from up above? To hell with it!" At two hundred yards, *dead on*, or nothing! Then suddenly the band came to an alert halt, looking right up at me.

Some vagary of down-drafted wind had spilled my sweated scent into the snow basin. There was a big, full-curved ram just off to the side of the rest of them. My finger squeezed slowly down on the first pressure, and I lined up just under his muzzle on the patch of his chest. My finger completed the squeeze. With the sudden thunder of muzzle blast, the rams spurted up the slope like up-tossed confetti. My ram had buck-jumped and alighted on his feet. He stood looking at me. His legs wobbled, he took a staggering step and keeled over like a drunken man. Kicking and bumping he rolled down the basin toward the edge of the rimrock. A full minute later I watched his body go plummeting out of sight over the brink. I sucked in a deep sigh. If the bullet didn't kill him, the drop would! I clambered, shd, slithered, fell, rolled down to the edge where I had seen him go over.

The bighorn ram lay on his side about thirty feet below, his horn hooked into a natural stair in the rimrock. Looking about his still form, I was amazed. There was a natural stair down

the rimrock, there, with the greenest patch of growth just below it that I'd seen on the mountain. It was there that the rams had been feeding, and they had climbed the rimrock up the natural stairway to the snow basin. This was the reason I had not seen them in the patch of green feed off to the east of the snow. If I had known of this lower patch, there wouldn't have been any need of going over the summit to reach the bedding spot. I went down and gutted out the animal, then started back toward Daniel.

He was wide awake, sitting up with a broad grin on his face, as I came down. He nodded happily.

"You get meat this time!" he stated.

"How you know?" I pigeon-Englished his dialect.

"Blood. You hands," he grinned. "We eat meat."

Right away he put a match to the pile of pine pitch he had prepared, then built up a fire with the broken, snow-worn wood. I waited for him to put on the coffee water. Instead, he walked over to the horses and took off his rope, motioning to me to follow him.

"What the hell!" I asked with annoyance. "What about the coffee and sandwiches?"

"I eat," he said blandly. "We go get meat."

"If no *coffee*, why you make fire?" I asked stubbornly.

"Roas' meat, by'n by," he grinned happily and started following my tracks up the slope. What the hell! Maybe he wasn't so dumb. Two hours later I ate Mountain Sheep steaks grilled on a sharpened branch stuck before the fire. The aroma was enough to make an invalid climb a mountain. I sat back happily on the ram skin, leaning back on the heavy curl of the head, and ate until my gut almost ached. Daniel slept until ten o'clock the next day—and it was a hell of a cold night.

There is very little, in my opinion, to distinguish hunting of mountain sheep from the hunting of mountain goat, except possibly that mountain sheep are much scarcer, the areas in which they are found being very few compared to the areas frequented by goats. They usually pick the highest range of mountains in a chain and stay up high—if anything, higher than

goats. For a 350-pound animal to keep fat and heavy on the sparse growth of the ridge summits, would seem to be a remarkable feat. Actually, it isn't too remarkable, inasmuch as sheep and ptarmigan are about the only animals to inhabit the uppermost crust of the mountains. The summer growth of alpine plants is heavy, even lush for a short season, and the animals are particularly well spread out over a large unmolested range, unless cattle or domestic sheep are moved in. When the heavy snows of winter come, the bighorns move downhill, and in some cases will come right to the farms of the lowlands for fodder.

Mountain sheep are usually gregarious, the rams bunching up in small groups when they are driven away from the herd of ewes with their new lambs. Often a big ram will stay with the ewes all summer, supposedly to manage the flock. The younger rams spend the summer together, fighting and butting occasionally, for the test of the rut later on. They feed early in the morning, then as the sun gets high and hot, they usually make for a shaded side of a peak, or a snow patch with wet ground around it. The main reason for this is that they desire relief from the sudden, intense heat in the rarified atmosphere of their habitat. They have a very fine woolly undercoat, with a stiff, almost bristly, outer covering which determines the color and makes them impervious to almost any winter cold. In zero weather they are particularly active and are apt to roam some distance in a day. Once shot at, they will often leave a range for other distant mountains, but this is not always so.

Like many other wild animals, they are curious, and will often appear stupid by standing and watching while the hunter shoots them down. Actually, this is not stupidity. It is trust in their own agility to outdistance any other animal in their domain. They could not be expected to know until after a first encounter that a man can kill from afar. Drop a couple of rams out of a group, and the remaining animals will be as cagey as antelope. Sheep seem to have acute hearing, as well as scenting ability and sight.

When startled, mountain sheep are apt to go in any direc-

tion, up, down, or across the ridges, usually, if not up, off to the windward. A good average hunter can take them without a guide, except for the purpose of packing into the country. He can make sure of their presence in the chosen area by the blackish droppings, and the round, rather broad hoof prints, the shallow cupped beds in, or near, snow, which latter receptacles sometimes stink of urine. Where the country is a muddy shale, or is snow covered and steep, there are usually well-defined lines crisscrossing the hills. These are so well used that they show up like spider webs stretched across the slopes. Good glasses will always bring them out for the hunter, and when he eventually reaches them, he will be surprised to find that they are from six to eighteen inches wide, and are pounded hard and easy to walk upon. When hunting bighorns, it is a good idea to cross shale on these tracks to avoid making the rocks roll. Also, the trails will often lead to the vicinity of the band.

A good highpower rifle, ballistically above a .32 Special, is the best to use. The .300 Savage, Winchester .270, .30-'06 U S., 303 British, 7-mm. Mauser, 8-mm. Mannlicher are all excellent rifles with sufficient power to put the bighorn down with a single well-placed shot. Iron sights are good enough if the hunting has been undisturbed, in which case it is sometimes possible to approach to within fifty yards of the rams. Telescope sights are good, too, but the usually tough climbing often bruises them out of line, and if the weather is misty, or snowing and cold, the lenses may be fogged up at the crucial moment. Although I have shot only one sheep, I have many times been in their native grazing country and have always found it open shooting.

The 173-grain slug of my 7-mm. Mauser went into the chest of my ram, grazing the shoulder bone, which probably caused the missile to break up as it did. But, in breaking the copper jacket, the main part of the slug smashed the heart and lungs, and smaller fragments drove through to the inner side of the back ham. The terrific punch in the vital organs, the shock against solid bone, were most likely the reason he only buck-jumped once, then keeled over. The bones of the ram compare

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with those of a big mule deer and will break under the same impact. Even a poorly shot ram won't have much chance of getting away, because of his need of all his faculties to climb and jump in the very precipitous country in which he lives. However, to shoot carelessly at a bighorn is to break a true sportsman's trust. These wonderful animals are scarce and bring forth only one or two lambs a year. They have against them the odds of many predators. Hunting should be sparing, even where they are plentiful, and ranges should be kept free of domestic sheep and cattle for them. They can be brought back to abundance, as they have in some states, but it takes a long, long time.

The head, even with a sparing curl, is a most beautiful trophy, and the hide makes a good small rug. The meat should be preserved at all costs. The latter resembles tame sheep or lamb in flavor, with very little gaminess about it. Don't let your guide talk you into leaving it. Bring it out with the trophy, even if you spend another day doing it.

You'll sweat up your last ounce of moisture by the time you get into ram pastures, but the expenditure will be worth it!

9 : *Grizzly Bear*



RIGHT AFTER the classic argument about the right gun for the right animal comes the equally classic folklore of the bear with the silver-tipped pelt. The grizzly is a fine bear, a great trophy, and a hell of an animal to hunt. Put a black-bear pelt on the floor or wall, and someone is bound to say, "Did you shoot that bear?" But put a *grizzly bear* pelt in the same place, and people look at you with awe and say, "You didn't shoot *that* bear, *did you?*"

Why? Because we are all human, and a grizzly is the star of the show. He is big, he is beautiful in color, and he is hard to get. He is hard to get for two reasons. Like the mountain goat, he isn't too plentiful, and he is hard to get also because he lives in most cases up in the mountains, in country that is rugged and downright dangerous to set foot in.

There is no other species of animal that preys on a grizzly consistently. He is more than a match for practically anything that will bother him, except mankind. He is not gregarious by nature, and often resents other grizzlies when not in search of, or carrying out, the duties of parenthood. It is not uncommon, however, to see grizzlies in pairs, or even groups, but it is more common to see them singly, or such is the experience of hunters and trappers whom I know. I have seen only a few in all my time in the woods and on the wilderness waters, and all of them were alone. As a matter of fact, one bear of any kind is a heart-

tilting sight, and if it is a grizzly, it does something to the hunter that other bears don't.

A friend of mine, Bill Davidson, always wanted to take a grizzly. He was a week-end and autumn-vacation hunter, just as most of us are. Bill is also a good shot and excellent woodsman. He was in the coastal region north of Vancouver, near Alert Bay, where, from what I have seen of tracks, and others have seen of grizzlies, it seems there are more of this species than at any other place in the world. They come down to the rivers, which are world renowned for their salmon and trout runs, and feed much as black bears do all over North America.

To get the story out of Bill, we had to loosen his tongue at a small hunting club to which several of us belonged. More than slightly talkative myself, I had told of a couple of incidents in which bears had almost scared the pants off me. Bill, a good-natured, somewhat shy guy, grinned after I was through and said, "Mike, I'm glad you told that one. It gives me enough nerve to tell one on myself that I have never told before.

"I borrowed that .375 Magnum I was showing you a couple of years ago and went up into some logged-off country back of us that was supposed to have grizzlies. I figured the .375 was just about the kind of odds I wanted with a grizzly anywhere, even though I had a .30-'06 at home.

"This guy and I went up into the logging area and started up the road. We moseyed along for about an hour, and he was the most talkative and the friendliest sort of guy you can imagine. He was smoking all the time and talking in a loud voice. I thought if I got rid of him I'd get a chance at a grizzly, but not without losing him.

"When we got to a fork in the logging road I suggested that we separate, he to hunt the slash to one side, I the other. He looked kind of sheepish, and maybe a little nervous, so I said, 'You won't get lost. You can always take the logging trail back.'

"He started to say something, then seemed to think better of it. I cut off through the slash timber for about ten minutes and started to head for the base of a rock slide. I climbed up on the end of a fallen log that was about a hundred feet long. Running



alongside it was another log about the same size. The location was on top of a knoll, and I figured I'd survey the country over which I was going to hunt.

"A noise at the end of the log I was standing upon attracted my attention, and what did I see but a big, darkish grizzly climbing upon the log that was parallel to mine.

"Oh brother!

"I just stood and looked, then I just stood and shook. That grizzly looked as high at the hump as I was at the shoulders. It came slowly down the other log wig-wagging its head with that peculiar side-winding, pigeon-toed motion they have.

"I put the 375 Magnum up to my shoulder and pulled the trigger on an empty chamber. I injected a shell, ejected it, injected another, pulled the bolt back, slammed it home, back and forth, until I had filled the chamber with every shell in the magazine and *I didn't pull the trigger once!* Every shell went over my shoulder!

"I just stood there like a quivering fish. The grizzly came up the log until it was right opposite on the other log, about two feet from me, looked up as if to say 'S'matter, Bub?' took a big deep breath, and jumped off the end of the log.

"I think there was something he smelled that he didn't like. He ambled away without looking back. Just for his good sportsmanship I let him go. I don't think I could have got down off that log right then for a tall drink and a hot blond."

What happened to Bill might happen to any hunter of grizzly bears. The build-up of the grizzly name alone, *before* the hunter ever gets in range of a specimen, is enough to give any man but a healthy one palpitations of the heart.

Once, when I was younger and more foolish, I tried to prove how courageous I was. Two of us were returning home one Saturday night with a couple of girls after an evening of dancing. As the dance was held in a big park, I thought it would be fun to go by the bear's cage and show off (the punch served at the dance had something to do with this). I climbed over the guard rail and stood against the bars, rattling them and yelling for the bear to come out and see what an Irishman looked like on

Saturday night. The bear showed the proper sort of reluctance any sucker requires. I climbed up the ten-foot bars with the avowed and too loudly voiced intention that I was going to pull the bear out of the sanctity of the den by his short tail.

There was a sharp clickety-clickety of long claws on the cement floor below me. Two girls screamed, my chum yelled bloody murder, and I found out just how *brave* I was

With presence of mind quite commendable for one as startled as my pal was, Frank produced my cigarette lighter, which he had borrowed from me earlier in the evening, climbed over the guard rail, and started flicking the lighter. About six inches above the banging front paws of the grizzly, I shook and hollered as if I was being murdered. Either by mistake or by design, Frank got the lighter lit and shoved it into the belly fur of the up-ended grizzly. The bear backed up to swat Frank's arm off at the shoulder, and I jumped backward off the iron bars. The two sprained ankles I got were just what I deserved. One of the girls was out like a light, the other running around in circles screaming hysterically—just like I felt.

My reason for telling this story is to impress upon the reader the fact that the grizzly of the episode ignored me *until I was apparently entering his precincts*. The moral: don't drink punch before going to the park with pretty girls, or, don't make trouble for a grizzly unless your gun is loaded and you aren't.

Grizzly bears in much-hunted territory are apt to be as cagey as whitetails. They will take off for parts unknown very much like average black bears at the sight or scent of man. I remember a meeting I had with a grizzly bear at a time when I wanted a good pelt. Phil Eastman and I had been hunting in a section of the Rocky Mountains near Canal Flats. We had been lucky enough to get our moose and elk on the first two days of hunting. For that reason we left the Rockies and headed into the Selkirk Range to the east and south in search of a couple of whitetail deer. But while we were in the Rockies I had noticed that of several hunters present, all but Phil and I hunted in pairs. Being of a curious nature and preferring to hunt alone, I asked one of the pairs of hunters why they didn't separate in order that they

might cover twice as much ground. The answer was one word: "Grizzlies!"

That night in camp I had razzed these men, who were local mountaineers. They took it in good part but related so many stories to give point to their respect for the grizzly bear that they convinced me, at least, of their own wariness. But I did not realize their stories had had any effect on my attitude towards the genus *Ursus*. A grizzly was, as far as I was concerned, flesh, blood, and bone—just another colored bear. So when Phil and I got into Christian Valley I didn't pay too much attention to the news from a farmer that a big grizzly had cleaned out the small herd of cattle a farmer at the end of the valley had bred. The depredations of the grizzly had actually cleaned him out and broken him so he had to leave the valley.

As a matter of fact, I became so interested in the whitetail-deer sign that I forgot all else, even the tons of overturned boulders and torn-up turf. I heard a movement just beyond a hedge of short jack pine, and knowing that the level floor of the valley was open for a few hundred yards beyond the hedge, I thrust myself as quietly and quickly forward as I could. The land rose to a six-hundred-foot knoll upon which Phil should be at that moment, and even if I did scare the deer, I figured I'd drive it toward him for a shot.

I burst from the hedge to find I was wrong. I was in an open little meadow of about half an acre surrounded by a circle of short pines. About fifty feet away a gray-maned grizzly was examining me with a nasty look. Its forepaws were over a rotten log it had just split asunder, and its wicked looking snout was covered with rusty brown rotted wood. The hair went up along its hump just as the hair did on my neck, only for a different reason. My 7-mm. at fifty feet felt like a wet piece of well-cooked spaghetti. I backed slowly into the hedge of pine, out of sight of the grizzly, heard a loud, earth-quaking woosh from its nostrils, had a pine needle jab me in the rump, and let out a yell like a gigmatized banshee.

There was an accompanying squeal from the meadow, accompanied by a terrific tearing down of small growth, and with

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a sigh of relief I discovered the sounds were receding in the distance. I don't blame the grizzly for being scared. If I'd heard a yell like the one I let out when the pine needle jabbed me, I think I'd have bored a new tunnel through the Selkirk Mountains.

I started to laugh at myself. The stories the hunters in the Rockies had told me had set me so much on edge that, the minute I saw the grizzly, I was psychologically conditioned to do just what, in fact, I did. No, in case you're wondering, I wouldn't want to be forced to shoot a grizzly at fifty feet, but neither would I want to shoot another black bear that close.

The grizzly is just bone and meat, like any animal in God's kingdom. A rifle bullet will do as much damage to a grizzly as it will to a black bear, cougar, or jaguar. The main thing to do is place the bullet where it will do the utmost damage in putting the animal down.

The heart shot from front or side is the easiest. If placed right it will stop the animal in twenty-five yards. I have killed a lot of big and small game animals with it, and have never seen one go over that distance. As to the bullets that will break bone but not expand, I am no authority at all. I know one well-established gun expert who writes of shooting through the shoulders and breaking bone as the only way to kill a grizzly at short distances. I have yet to see any big game animal with both shoulders broken by any gun. A hunting bullet is made of lead and copper or nickel. When a slug hits hard bone, it usually disintegrates and spreads its impact around, regardless of weight and velocity. I have had to shoot a big bear in the spine with an army bullet. That full-plated nickel bullet broke into fragments on the comparatively small bones of the spinal column, and threw lead in small pieces almost down to the foot pads of the bear's front legs. It would have done the same thing on a grizzly.

The grizzly's big flat head offers a tempting target, and, as a matter of fact, it is usually the target that is offered a hunter at close range. The grizzly carries its head low and its hump rises above it. Thus, its chest is partially covered by the lower

jaw. A bullet just below the nose will drive into the heart if the land is level or slanting upward. My examination of the skulls of grizzlies tells me that anything in the power and bullet range of a .30-'06, 7-mm., .270, or .300 Savage would smash the bone structure to smithereens from any angle but a highly deflecting one. As to driving any bullet through and breaking any two major joints or bones of the limbs, I think that a .50 caliber might do it. I think any man willing to *carry* such a rifle in the bush is a true sport, and I do mean *sport*.

The hunt for grizzly in the Rockies is a real outdoors experience. The animals inhabit the slides during the summer and fall, spending most of their waking lives digging out the roots of what residents of the country call "mountain potatoes." I'm sorry I could not recognize it as a bulb that I knew in two of the instances when I examined stomach contents after a kill. When freshly cut open, the upper intestine smells like newly pared potatoes and reveals a mass of half-inch long bulbs and roots. The nails of the grizzly are long and the paws carrying them are worked like garden weeders. That is what they are to a grizzly. The grizzly eats vegetation most of its life and seldom kills other game animals. There is no doubt that it will feed on winter-killed animals, or any flesh that falls to its lot, but it is not normally a predator. For this reason the best place to find a grizzly is on snow slides after the snow has gone. Among the rocks and mud, I counted on one trip twenty-seven different plants, from wild onion through columbine to larkspur and bluebells. It was among those lovely blooming plants and wild strawberries that I put down a lovely pelted grizzly.

As slides are usually open to view, it is a good idea when you come to the foot of them to scan them well with glasses. If you see any fresh earth turned, much as if a small boy had been digging treasure in your tulip bed, that is grizzly sign. The dung has more of a tendency to keep its original shape than the dung of a black bear does, because the food is more largely filled with fiber, not loose with berries and leaves. Rocks are turned by the railroad carload, moss turned away, and whole small bushes rooted out. Seeing such evidence, it will do you

no harm to sit and wait out the day, diligently scanning all slides, particularly the one you are on.

I have noticed that grizzlies will range somewhat from one mountain to another, and that they seem to move up from the creeks early in the morning. That would place them near water just at dawn, and in the feed at early morning. I don't think they are nocturnal in their habits, because there is little reason for them to be so. They don't fear any animal. Like all bears, they hibernate during the winter months, and in the spring they become scrawny just as they emerge after the deep sleep is over.

The flesh of a grizzly is among the most delicious flavored and succulent known. It looks, in a prime animal, much like prime beef, fat, firm, and fresh appearing to the eye. Baked, fried in steaks, or boiled in a stew, it is tasty, tender, and delicious. The flavor is much like wild mallard, or good pork, and not dark and stringy as in the case of most black-bear meat. Skinned, the carcass looks much like a dumpy heavyweight boxer, barrel-chested and very heavily muscled in the front shoulders. As a matter of fact, any bear when dressed out looks as a skinned man presumably would look with his head off. This appearance has led many hunters to an aversion to eating bear meat, and many guides dislike taking the carcass out, or even skinning it. Don't let anyone tell you the meat of a prime grizzly isn't worth the packing out. You will enjoy it as much as any wild game you have ever tasted, perhaps more.

While hunting the Rocky Mountains with Bob Kuhn we co-operated in the killing of a splendid grizzly. We were on our way into a valley where we had seen elk on the previous day, and we had crossed the fateful slide at least half a dozen times. Snow had fallen during the night and mists that fogged out our vision to a few feet were drifting over the slopes. In the snow at the foot of the slide, Louis Capilo, our old guide, pointed out fresh grizzly tracks. Frankly, I was not too interested, but knowing Bob had yet to see a grizzly, I suggested that we slide from point to point quite carefully. There were small hedges of juniper and broken pines jutting into the steep surface, a small, live creek trickling down the center, an odd upthrust ridge of

rock, and some big boulders. Keeping under cover at each turn of the slide, we waited until the mists drifted and the slide was clear to the next turn before going on.

About a thousand feet of climb brought us to a spot where we could get a full view up to the runrock, but the fog had thickened, so that we only had fleeting glimpses of the whole area as it cleared. I was enjoying a feed of wild strawberries, a new thrill to me as October approached, and Bob was kidding me about my out-of-season tastes. Louis, who was better equipped with good sense and hunting knowledge, suddenly went flat on the slide and motioned to us to do the same.

Fifty yards away, across the small creek, a big grizzly was complacently tossing earth out into the slide. It had apparently been making so much noise tumbling the rock and soil down that it didn't hear us, and the fog had hidden us from view. I flipped off the cover on my scope, and the grizzly seemed to be right in my lap. I drove a .303 British soft point at the joint of the front leg and shoulder. The grizzly stepped up just as I squeezed off, then started to dance all over the slide, batting at imaginary opponents. It looked for all the world like a shadow boxer alone in a ring. Suddenly it went down on all fours and bolted into a small hedge of pine and juniper. The fog drifted down and blanketed us off. I ran up the ridge hoping to get a shot at the grizzly, while Louis hollered blue murder for me to stay still, as we were too close, in his opinion.

Finally, as the mist drifted away, I could distinguish the fawn patch of hide and hump above the bushes I raised up and fired just below what I figured would be the joint of the shoulder from the front. The head was not in view. The grizzly came out of that short brush in a twenty-foot jump and stumbled in a heap on the creek bottom. It got up, starting toward us, and Bob hit it in the neck with his .300 Savage. The animal got up once more, then foundered right in the creek bed. Some would say the grizzly charged us I don't know. It was facing me when my bullet smashed into the chest cavity. It may have been intending to charge me the moment it was hit, and it certainly came right out at me, but that may have been muscular

reaction. The only thing that makes me think it wasn't muscular reaction was the twenty-foot jump.

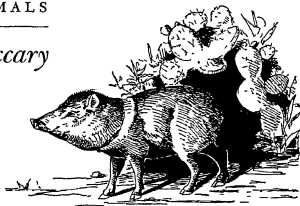
I found that my first bullet had gone through the short wrist bone, tearing a big hole, and had bludgeoned the lower part of the sternum off the breast. It was all of three inches low, and the grizzly was in shape to do a powerful amount of fighting. The second shot smashed into the heart and lungs, and Bob's bullet tore out the windpipe as a finishing blow. The hide was one of the most beautiful I have ever seen, a lovely light fawn tipped with silver, accompanied by a black mane and tawny chaps and under pelt. Bob had it made up into a rug with a full head mount, and it looked even lovelier.

The tracks of grizzly are much like those of any bear, with the exception that the claw marks reach some distance out in front of the pads and are much more clearly defined. If you see sign up high in the mountains you are probably in grizzly-bear country. The pelage varies from almost white to pure black. The more pronounced hump, much squarer head and blockier body, are the most easily recognizable features, aside from the hide, distinguishing the grizzly from the black or small brown bear. I'm inclined to believe that grizzlies and black and browns breed together where opportunity favors it, and as they are of closely related species, it is possible that many cross breeds do exist and have been shot. Against that I also place the fact that I have seen a pure silver-tip and a pure black bear with two cubs within a couple of miles of each other.

Mountain goats and sheep dwell within a thousand feet of grizzly bears, so, if you are in goat or sheep country, by all means keep an eye out for grizzly bears.



10 : *Peccary*



THE PECCARY is a mean little pig. A really mean little pig, with slashing, knife-like tusks that will cut a man to bits and rip the legs off a horse. It can run like a deer and will gang up on a hunter with much more courage than a pack of wolves, which may outweigh a peccary herd as much as five to one. Anyone who has hunted peccary, jabali, or "wild hawg," as some Texans refer to the swine-like animal, will testify to its ferocious game qualities, and more than one luckless hunter has been wounded or treed by the seemingly mild little animals.

They are really New-World swine (*Suidae*), but have a classification of their own (*Tayassuidae*), there being only two recognized species indigenous to North America. They are the Collared Peccary and the White-lipped Peccary. The Collared Peccary is common to the Americas from Texas to Rio Negra in Patagonia, while the White-lipped Peccary is seldom found except in an area of South and Central America lying between British Honduras and Paraguay. Actually smaller than they appear when you see them charging over the open grass country, they run somewhat over nineteen inches at the shoulder and up to forty-five pounds in weight. One I measured in the state of Guerrero, Mexico, was twenty inches from the tip of his cleft front feet to the top of his shoulder, thirty inches from snout to tail, and ten inches of that length was from the tip of his nose to the back of his skull. I guessed the weight at somewhat over

forty pounds, and the men with whom I was hunting said he was a big boar. He was plenty big enough for me. Particularly his teeth.

The hair of the peccary is bristly like that of most pigs, and greyish in color, really not much different in tone from that of a grizzly bear, which the peccary resembles in ferocity and courage. In the distance, a peccary appears blackish against the country in which it abounds.

Many years ago the peccary was quite abundant in Texas and was hunted both on foot and on horseback. I am told that it had become almost extinct there until recently, but that it is believed to be coming back. While I was in Texas I ran into the odd old hunter who had shot peccaries, and one who said he had put four slugs from a .44 Colt's revolver into a boar that he had to chase a mile on horse to get. Another hunter told me he could take me to some country near the border of Old Mexico where there were still good bands of peccaries, but as I was on my way to Mexico I couldn't avail myself of his invitation.

Next to the jaguar, or *El Tigre*, of Mexico, I most wished to get a crack at a peccary. While in Mexico City I was lucky enough to strike up an acquaintance with Jerry Breen of *El Tigre Armeria*, a really bang-up sporting goods store in downtown Mexico City. Jerry has lived in and hunted throughout Mexico for over twenty years. Genial of nature, big and bluff-hearted of approach, Jerry can tell a person more about the fishing and hunting of that great country than possibly any other American. I told him I'd like to shoot a peccary.

He said, "So would I! When do we go?"

It was a month later, when I came up from Lago Tequesquitengo from bass fishing, that I was able to ascertain when a trip could be arranged. Jerry told me he was taking a big party out to the state of Guerrero the following week, that he would be pleased to have me join them *if* I wanted to. Did I?

Huh! I'd been living for that week.

Jerry Breen and Jim Shirley of the Shirley Courts in Mexico City (a really swell guy and experienced hunter of Breen's caliber) headed the group of four cars. Jerry had brought along

a .30-30 Winchester rifle for me, because my gun (a 7-mm. Mauser, which is utterly banned in Mexico, since it is the official army rifle) had been stopped at the Mexican border. I looked at the carbine gratefully, if suspiciously.

"Big enough for *jabali*?" I asked Jerry skeptically.

"Big enough for any hawg," smiled Jerry, who added, with one of his broad grins, "If the hawg isn't too close."

After several hours driving, we were deep in the state of Guerrero. Off the highway, at an Indian village, we picked up a chief and several of his band. They, Jerry told me, were to act as beaters on the game drives in the hills. I wondered about that. I don't like drive hunting, and ordinarily am not desirous of guides, but I was to find out why when we got into the hills.

Several miles further into the hills we pulled off the highway, went through a primitive village, then out onto a mine road. We left the big cars there and, piling into the jeeps, ground out into the mountains. It was a typical mountain road, like most roads that lead into old logging camps or mines in any part of the North American continent. Winding perilously up the mountainside among cliffs and sheer canyons, it was in many places hewn out of live rock.

I watched the country curiously. Sprinkled generously with what looked like scrub oaks and many trees I did not know, palms, yuccas, and mescal cactus, the terrain was rolling, rugged, and covered with much dry grass. It looked like country that would feed almost any kind of game, birds, deer, and, I hoped, peccary. Several miles back in the mountains, we made camp late at night and bunked down under a huge tarpaulin. The Mexicans, or *los Indios*, disappeared into the surrounding blackness of the night, and I wondered where they were. Later that night I got out of my sleeping bag and wandered around in the moonlight. The Mexicans were strewn out over the ground like so many sacks of potatoes, snoring peacefully into their single serapes. Such is the complacent nature of these wonderful people. I listened to the night sounds, the chording of the flutes of crickets with the basso hum of other insects. In the distance I heard the bark of some animal that may have been a dog, but

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none of the familiar yip, yip, yip aawoooo of the coyote. I went back to sleep, after a careful look in my sack for scorpions, or, as the Mexicans call them, *alecranes*.

True to the Indian quality of the Northland, the beaters arose in the blueness of early light. We breakfasted heavily on eggs and ham loin, tortillas and beer, and as the sun rose clear above the surrounding hills, we headed back over the mountains on a narrow, well-defined trail. At the top of the mountain there was a palaver between Jerry Breen, Jim Shirley, and the venerable Indian chief. They were laying out the country as to posting. I longed to get out and traipse over it alone.

Rolling hills and plateaus, valleys and buttes, stretched as far as the eye could see. Twenty-foot mescal cacti, with their awe-inspiring mass of splendid yellow blooms, dotted the hill-tops, and scrub and other low trees ran down the valleys and thickened in the ravines. Yellow-dry grass, interlaced with many vines and plants unfamiliar to me, spread between the good cover of the trees and palms. I watched the old chief speak to his men, then motion to us hunters. Quietly he led some of us through the valley to a ridge top while Jim and Jerry led the other hunters to a ridge top which formed the other side of the valley from us. The hunters were spaced about one hundred yards apart. The beaters disappeared over another ridge, and the old chief, singling me out, came and sat beside me on a big rock. I thought perhaps Jerry had asked him to look after me, and felt a warm feeling for Jerry's solicitude, but also felt annoyed that I should be thought of as needing a protector. The old chief's eyes came straight to mine.

"*El patrón*," he said, referring in Spanish to Breen, "does tell me you are a great hunter from the North."

I grinned and puffed out my chest, answering him in Spanish with some deference. We sat and chatted. I asked him if there were many poisonous snakes in the country. He said there was none, but to watch out for the "little men." I asked him about them. He told me they were about six inches tall, looked just like little pink babies, that they could jump four feet, and if they bit you, their fangs were so poisonous that you died im-

mediately. They lived in the hills, among the grasses and stones, and didn't take kindly to strangers. They would lie quietly in wait until they heard a man and then cry like a baby to attract him. When he bent over to help them, they would face away, then jump up backwards and bite him in the face.

I watched his leathery old features as he related the story, even mildly chided him about such beliefs, in order to see his reaction. He was deadly serious, and pantomimed the actions of his creatures with his hands. Suddenly his old eyes lighted up and he listened carefully. I heard it too. Men far off, yelling and yelping like dogs. They were far down the channel of the valley that ran between the two ridges upon which we rested while waiting. The old chief motioned to me to follow him.

About ten feet from where we had been sitting, I looked down at the ground. A three-foot snake was coiled in striking position. I jumped clear and circled after the old chief. If that wasn't a rattler it was the best damned imitation I ever saw. No snakes, hell! He could look out for his "little pink men," but I'd watch for snakes *now*, and watch out for the "little men" after too much tequila.

As we perched on the rocky ridge top I heard something go by me in the dense growth, tried to locate it with my eyes. The old chief grinned and told me it was deer. Did I want a deer? No, thanks. I wanted a peccary!

The yelps of the drivers were clear and pronounced on the still, hot air. A quarter of a mile down, I thought I saw two black dots move. I pointed to them, and the old chief nodded.

"*Jabali*," he said quietly, identifying them as peccary.

They disappeared into the tall grass. We waited expectantly. Twenty minutes went by and the beaters themselves appeared in the waist-high grasses. The old chief motioned to me to stay where I was, he was going higher.

Suddenly, on top of an almost flat spot about six hundred yards away, I saw four peccaries racing and bouncing like deer. I was amazed. They were running as fast as any whitetail or mule buck, racing in a wedge-shaped formation right toward me. They veered off as a beater, who had got out in front of them,

popped out of the grass. At the angle at which they were coming, they would pass me within two hundred yards. I fidgeted.

The peccaries stopped about three hundred yards short. I raised my 30-30 carbine, but suddenly realized it was not my 7-mm. rifle. I couldn't take them at that distance with any accuracy. They milled to one side, then another, sprinted directly for my position, and I raised the rifle.

Two beaters suddenly appeared right in front of me, at about two hundred yards. The pigs milled and one of them dashed right between two other beaters, who had suddenly run up. The other three pigs started for the first two beaters. I fumed. It wasn't logical to shoot a strange rifle into a group of men and peccaries at two hundred yards, but I was tempted. Two shots rang out, and I saw one of the pigs charge toward a single beater. He jumped and disappeared in the grass. Then, all the peccaries gone, the drivers gathering around something in the tall grass. The old chief came back to me and motioned in the direction of the road. The drive was over, he said. It was too bad the beaters got between me and the pigs. His son, the one the pig had charged, had shot it. The old man must have had infinitely keen eyes. I hadn't even seen the gun go up. An hour later, the pig trussed, still alive, on the pole between them, the beaters confirmed his story.

I looked at the little animal lying shackled on the ground, and was just stooping over to examine it more closely when it raised its head and a terrific clatter set up. It sounded like castanets beating a rat-ta-ta-tat as I jerked back.

"Look out for those teeth, Mike," warned Jerry. "He's still alive."

"Were those his teeth," I gasped, "making that sound!"

"Sure enough was," he agreed. "Take a look at them."

The boar's teeth were about two and one-half inches long, protruding out of the lower jaw and shaped like, and as sharp as, a Bowie knife, flat-bladed, instead of round and pointed. The pig gnashed them again with that forbidding sound, and I realized how they could cut the tendons on a horse's legs with one lunge, or rip a bear or man to pieces.

It had been hit in the spine with a slug from an old .410 shotgun, a 300-grain modern slug, at a distance of about fifteen feet. The slug had broken the back and torn into the entrails, yet the pig later started to walk away on only its two front feet when the beaters untied it from the pole, being careful to leave a stout rope tied to its paralyzed hind legs. The head was erect, and it dashed toward me on its front legs as I went up to it. Only a jerk by a strong man pulled it back. I asked the natives to kill it and put the gallant little guy out of its misery.

One of the hunters killed it by cutting its throat while two Mexicans held it down, and *they were strong bushmen*. Such is the staying power of the peccary. I watched the skinners cut the scent gland from the back. It is a large white lump of fat-covered gland tissue, located just forward of the rise of the rump, with a musty smell to it, and if left in the dead animal for long, it will taint the meat.

We made two more such drives that day which netted two more animals, but I did not get a peccary. Looking at the sunset from the top of the mountain, I saw, many miles back in the direction from which we had come, a flat-topped tableland. I asked the Indian who came up at the time about it. It looked to me as if it would be good pig country, if I could judge from the area we were in. He confirmed my belief.

"Yes, Señor," he agreed. "A couple of years ago there were many *jabalíes* on that mesa. I once counted twenty-four when I was over there. It has been hunted much since then. Now, all the hunters come this way, because it is not so near to the main highway."

I looked more closely at the plateau. A mile or two down from it, I saw the line of the highway drifting through the haze of the dying sun. It looked like a place I could hunt for myself without any help. Twenty-four peccaries! Some of them must have escaped the hunters. I asked him about the roads into the plateau. He looked amazed.

"But, Señor," he said, "there are no roads. One has to climb."

That did it. Climbing was just my meat. The hunt was over and we all went our separate ways. It had been a happy, en-

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joyable experience with some real men, rough, friendly guys who liked to hunt for the love of the sport. But, I didn't have my *own* peccary.

Three weeks later my wife said suddenly, "Why don't you go after peccary on your own, dear? You could do it!"

I looked up at her in surprise. How did she know I was sitting moping about peccary? I hadn't said anything about it, inasmuch as a hunt seemed out of the question.

"How did you know what I was thinking?" I asked.

"Twelve years with a man like you," she smiled. "How could I help but know! You've got little pigs dancing in front of your eyes. Why don't you try it? Only be careful!"

That did it. The only gun I could find belonged to a man in the next hacienda. It was a Remington .22 pump action. It did not seem quite the gun to go barging into a band of wild pigs with. But, from what I had seen in my examination of the big boar's skull and bone structure, I figured a hot .22 long-rifle slug would smash most of the bones, particularly the skull—if it was close enough. But, if it was *too* close? Hell! That was the sport of hunting—wasn't it?

I packed my sleeping bag, the rifle, two water cans, some tinned food, and a tarpaulin into my old Packard. Six hours later I was down at what I figured to be the foot of the plateau. As it was dark by then, I slept fitfully in the front seat. But at the first sign of light in the east, I piled out.

Looking up the bleak, grassy slopes to the top of the plateau, I judged it to be about two thousand feet to the summit from the road, about an hour of climbing, but the area was cleft with good valleys that looked as if they might hold a trickle of water. I started right up the face, after pounding across half a mile of flat valley land. The day had come quickly, as it does in the tropics, and the heat was sweltering in. Sweat ran from every pore of my body, soaking my shirt and darkening the leather of my shoes.

Lizards ran like racers out from under my feet, and for some



crazy reason I began to think of the "little pink men" of the old chief's stories. Maybe it was the heat beating through my straw sombrero. I'd asked Jerry about them. He'd smiled and said, "I've *seen 'em*. But not in the mountains. That was before I quit drinking." Anyway, I had done a lot of thinking about them.

Another lizard scooted from under my feet, I could have sworn he was pink. All of a sudden it occurred to me what might be the solution. "*Color de rosa*" had been the phrase the chief had used to describe the color. *Rosa* may be any color to an Indian, from pink to violent orange. I sat on the edge of the plateau and surveyed the patches of scrubby growth and short, bushy trees. My mind followed the pattern of the "little pink men." He had said they jumped *backwards*. Suddenly I had it. It was the gila monster of which he spoke. The broad bands of orange, the reputed habit of throwing itself backward in order to strike with its horrible, deadly poisonous fangs. Its thick short body. So that was it, but what about peccary? Where in tarnation would I find one?

Cruising along the outer edge of the plateau, I saw where it ran deep into a darkly foliaged valley. If I didn't miss my bet, the pigs went down this face into that valley for water and forage. Somewhere along the rise to the flat tableland, I'd be able to find traces of a beaten path, just like that made by deer—I hoped.

A buzzard flock hung in the sky above me, pacing the path of my footsteps. This reminded me to take a good drink of water. As I put the brackish liquid down, I looked at the ground around me. By the hot sands of Jerusalem! Those were pig prints, or I'd eat my straw sombrero! Several tiny dabs showed in the dry adobe. I felt them and found them freshly turned, unweathered, not cobwebbed, and they led into the center of the plateau.

I sneaked along quietly for about a quarter of a mile. Lovely flashings, colored red, orange, yellow, purple, and blue, were of birds, made further evident as they twittered and darted in the mesal tops. Doves spurted from under my feet, and I saw a doe deer lead her fawn into the brush. The land was as flat as a plate, noisy under foot with dried growth and spiny from many

different types of cactus. It wasn't possible to see more than fifty yards most of the time, because of the dense thickets and high, grassy growth. But, to me, every thicket held a band of pigs ready to tear me to pieces. The sweat on me wasn't all from the heat, and I looked at the rifle tube to be sure that it was crammed with shells. I injected one into the chamber, then set the safety. At the click of the action, something dashed off to the right of me toward the drop off of the plateau. I held on the sound, gun at my shoulder.

A small whitetail buck spun out of a thicket, heading for the next one. I let out a gasp. It had sounded like a whole band of peccary running through that dry growth.

About half a mile further on, I sat down on the edge of a depression several acres in extent, the surface of which was covered with grass and cactus, and the rim lined with trees on all sides. I took out a salt pill, sucked it, and took a big swig of water, then lazed back against the rock, after a careful look around my seat for *alecranes*. Tipping the sombrero down over my eyes, I adopted the old Mexican custom of siesta. How long it was before I heard that clattering sound, I don't know. The sun was higher. The clattering sound came to me again. It sounded like castinets.

Holy mackerall! Peccary tusks!

My gut felt as if it was suddenly full of cold water. The hair on my head seemed to lift my sombrero right off my cranium. Involuntarily, goofy with sleep, I said aloud, "Huh!"

As my mouth snapped shut on the sound, I saw two peccaries facing each other. One was a big, old, gray boar with long yellow teeth, the other smaller, blacker. Behind the big boar were four other wild pigs, and they were not more than sixty yards off. At the sound of my surprised "Huh," the old boar's teeth clattered again, and he whipped his head around in my direction.

Six wild pigs!

And, not a tree I could climb anywhere within one hundred yards, unless you count organ cactus. The rock against which I had my back was about two feet high, not much protection against a pack of charging pigs. Brother!

I raised the gun and sighted on the weaving head of the big boar. The young one slunk off into the bushes, and two of the others took short paces toward the thicket. Two others stood behind the boar facing me, then with a sudden, quick movement like deer, they darted after the others. The old boar turned his head, trying to make up his mind what it was all about and whether he should follow them. I made it up for him.

Crack!

The rifle sounded like popping corn. I had the sight right in front of his ear, low down. He jumped up in the air, then came down on his back with a crash. That was it! The one shot I'd wanted. He'd just turned his head into the right position.

I climbed up on the rock and injected another shell. My hands were trembling and slimy with cold sweat. If the rest of them came out, I'd give 'em hell—a little hell anyway. I listened intently. The sound of crashing far across the plateau came to my ears. There was no doubt that those pigs had been hunted before. The fear of a rifle shot was in them. I went over to the pig carefully, gun ready in case the herd came back. The old peccary was deader than month-old gossip. He had barely twitched.

I cut out the scent gland and gutted him right there, examining in due course the bullet hole. The bullet had smashed through the thin wall near the ear, and apparently had lodged in the brain case, as there was no exit hole. Proudly I slung him across my shoulder and headed for the car. Forty pounds of wild pig meat with a good set of two-and-a-quarter-inch tusks.

I have eaten a lot of wild game. I'd say that the peccary is closer to the grizzly in taste than any other animal I know of. It has a flavor not unlike wild pigeon fried in pork fat. Possibly the reason for the similarity to the grizzly is that the two animals eat much the same food, mostly herbivorous—grass and roots, with meat only occasionally. The peccary I killed was full of what seemed to be chewed fibrous roots, and a green forage I couldn't distinguish.

I can't say much of the habits of peccaries, except that they seem to inhabit the same country you would recognize as deer

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habitat. I haven't seen their droppings, but I imagine that, judging by their feed, it would be bulky and elongated in shape. The animals I have seen were near heavy growth with interspacing of grass and cactus, high up in the mountains, but near a valley or canyon that had a vestige of water in it.

As to guns for peccaries, my experience tells its own story, but I'd say the Savage .303, the Remington .32 Special, the Winchester .30-30 were ideal in bullet weight and velocity. A larger bore gun would be inclined to tear them apart, for all their rugged structure. I used a .22 long rifle, for the reason that I had no choice, and it did a good job with Super-X ammunition. The bone structure is not heavy, and will smash fairly easily. It would seem that even a .32-20 caliber, a .250-3000, or a .25-20 would kill them easily, *given a well-placed shot*. But you may not get a chance to choose your shot. If several pigs are coming at you, the slug of a heavier caliber rifle would be good odds. You may get caught as I did, with no tree to climb.

The peccary has every right to be classed as big game, not for his size, but for the wonderful courage and fight that characterize him.

11 : *Iguana*



THE FIRST TIME I ever saw an iguana I had a feeling of both revulsion and fear. It crossed the highway between Taxco and Cuernavaca while I was driving with my friend Bill Gulick, a well-known Western writer. It was a big lizard, about three feet long, and it looked for all the world like a dragon out of the fairy tales, or a prehistoric brontosaurus, but the characteristic that really amazed me was the immense speed with which it moved. My belief had always been that cold-blooded animals moved sluggishly. The dark grey thing streaked across the road a bare yard ahead of us, and into the bushes I remarked rather half-heartedly that I'd like to go back and see the animal. So I wasn't at all disappointed when Bill scowled and said, "I think they're poisonous." I was satisfied to argue about that statement rather than go back, but I was fairly sure the gila monster was the only poisonous lizard in North America. As it turned out, it was the only time I ever argued with Bill when I was right. My gardener told me they were not "*venenoso*," and very succulent eating—or so he said.

The next time I saw an iguana it was living in the same house with us, and I can say truthfully it wasn't a bad tenant, not half as noisy as a rat, nor anywhere near as filthy or thieving. My wife told me she had seen "a tremendous lizard—or something" poke its head from under the tiles of the roof. Then, as she was knitting, she sat and waited for developments. Soon

the animal took heart, and keeping an eye on her, it climbed agilely from under the round tiles and lay down on the hot roof in the full glare of the tropical sun. She got up some fifteen minutes later thinking it was asleep. It was gone so quickly she couldn't be sure if she had seen it go into the roof tiles. When she told me about it, I was rather skeptical. I inquired of our Mexican caretaker. He said, "O sí, sí, *Señor!* But there are four of them, a whole family. They are a good animal. They eat the bugs and the *alecrán!*"

The news that they ate the *alecrán* or scorpion was heartening, because it was actually the only thing we feared in Mexico. We had two young children who liked to lift up boards and turn over stones, and the bite of the scorpion is a vicious and toxic thing. I looked more kindly upon the iguanas from then on, but I was surprised to find that they fed not only on bugs, birds, and chickens, but upon the leaves of trees also. After we had been in the house for a month, the family of iguanas became at least more used to us, but never anywhere nearly tame. At the end of three months, a sudden movement would send them scurrying off the tile roof into the tiles. Their eyes seemed keen enough to see a person approaching from fifty yards away in the garden.

A couple of week ends after we had been living at Lago Tequesquitengo, I noticed a lot of hunters coming down on the week ends from Mexico City, and I wondered what they were after. Enquiry gave me the information that they hunted rabbits, doves, and iguanas, the latter being an equally regarded trophy and food with the other two, and as game, more wily, hence harder to take. That interested me. I was also told that they could bite like the devil and often did.

I was fishing with Sr. Beichler at the end of the lake for the big white bass for which the resort is famed when I heard a loud commotion on the cliff face above us.

"*Bueno! Iguana grande!*" he said noticing my consternation.

A gray-black streak sped up the sheer cliff as if its possessor were running full pelt on level ground, and I agreed with Sr. Beichler. It was a *big iguana*. In response to my questions, he

told me that he had often hunted these reptiles with a rifle or a shotgun, and that they were not only game, but sometimes grew to four feet in length and were, as previously reported, very delicious eating. Further, that in such places as Vera Cruz and Acapulco the meat was sold in the markets, and the skins were very much prized for shoes and purses. My interest quickened.

Shortly after that I had a good look at a big buck iguana that moved into the tiles of our roof. He was fully as heavy as a rabbit, and for a short distance twice as quick. The body was gunmetal black, with a yellowish underbelly and a quite distinctive pattern on the skin. So, when José Lareñas suggested I take one of his .22 rifles and go along with him for an iguana hunt, I accepted with alacrity.

We hiked across a couple of miles of cactus- and mescal-covered country to a deep canyon that split the otherwise unbroken plain. He explained to me that the cracks and fissures of the canyon were ideal hiding and sunning places for the iguanas, and the lush growth and water at the bottom of the canyon were conducive to the big lizards' livelihood, since many birds inhabited the brush.

José saw the first two iguanas and with a fast shot put the second one down. I picked it up gingerly when it stopped kicking from a .22 slug in the head. It was about twenty-four inches from nose tip to tail and seemed about the ugliest looking North American game animal I ever saw. It would weigh about the same as a good rabbit, surprisingly heavy, with long, hooked claws and sharp, small teeth that looked much like the claws and teeth of a wildcat in size and shape.

I drifted up the canyon ahead of José, who had turned his attention to a flight of doves that had alighted in the trees back where we had come from. It was difficult traveling and noisy. Thorn bushes plucked at my jeans and I got stabbed in the thigh twice by mescal and maguey cactus. The latter proved a painful jab, too. The big desert plants are as rigid as a board, and the barbs are supposed to be poisonous. After about fifteen minutes of sneaking as quietly as it was possible to do on the dry, rocky slope, I looked up into a tree about fifty yards away. I thought

I had heard a bird rustle the dry branches and was hoping José had put the doves up my way. After some seconds of careful scrutiny, all I could make out was a blackish dead branch lying in the crotch of the live tree. I took a step forward. The branch moved and I saw that it had a big, ugly head. A big iguana!

I brought my .22 rifle up and placed the iron sights on the reared head. That was as far as I got! The iguana just fell out of the tree like a dead piece of wood, but when it hit the dusty ground it ran like a scared jack rabbit. I laughed and chuckled to myself, thinking what a stupid animal it was. Huh! So clumsy that it got scared and fell right out of the tree. José's gun cracked below me, and I saw a dove drift down in a puff of loosened feathers. I was still grinning about the iguana's falling out of the tree when José came up with his dove and iguana in his free hand. I told him about the big lizard's falling out of the tree when it saw me put up my gun. He laughed heartily, and I supposed he was enjoying my joke too.

"*Caramba, hombre!*" he grinned, a patient look coming over his genial brown features. "Iguanas always fall out of trees. They are very smart that way. It does not hurt them—and it is the quickest way down. No?"

That was the first time I ever found out that a lizard was smarter than I was. No? A guy needs to have a few things like that happen to him in order to give him the right perspective of himself. Me, I don't have to have a house fall on me. An iguana is enough. The next half hour showed me that iguanas are smart. The tumbling of a falling pebble was enough to start a quick rustle in a cranny of the steep cliffs above us. I began to get the idea and piece things together as I would, had I been hunting deer in the North. I remembered the habits of the iguanas in our house. They fed in the early hours of the morning, then, when the tropical sun was at its height, they crawled out on the scorching tiles and baked. Being cold-blooded animals, they liked the heat of the day. It meant that the iguanas would not be moving then. They would be soaking up the blazing rays on big rocks, or on the rugged ledges above us, close to a quick access to a pile of boulders or a crack in the cliff surface.



José's eyes were quickened to them. He pointed out a big buck iguana about thirty yards away. Try as I could, I could not distinguish it from the varicolored rock ledge upon which it rested. He placed his hand upon my arm for silence, after realizing I could not see it, and as quick as a boxer's feint he whipped up his rifle and pulled the trigger. There was a scramble on the ledge, and I saw the movement of the big lizard as it thrashed around in the death throes. Suddenly it tumbled over the ledge, and I thought, "That one isn't just too smart to climb down. It's dead." However the animal caught its front feet about two feet down the ledge and hung there. I thought José would shoot again, but instead he started to walk calmly forward.

"Better put another shot into it, José," I suggested.

"He's dead," he said with finality.

I didn't think it was so. The animal was hanging to the perpendicular, almost smooth rock face, and I didn't think any dead animal could possibly hang on so tenaciously. I followed José up the face of the cliff. The iguana hung perfectly still about fifteen feet above us. I expected it suddenly to spurt up the cliff as I had seen several others do. José looked up at the animal, leaned his rifle against a thorn bush, and picked up a good-sized rock. He pegged the stone at the cliff face but the animal did not move. He tossed a better aimed one which dislodged the front legs. The iguana hit the ground at our feet with a dull plop.

José picked it up and examined the bullet hole in the head. I was curious about a dead iguana hanging to a perpendicular cliff face. José took it by the head and simply placed it on the straight up-and-down surface, removed his hand. My eyes opened another notch. The animal clung to the straight wall as if it were alive. José grinned at my amazement.

"Killing an iguana is but half the hunting," he said amiably. "Notice their claws. They are sharp and hooked like those of a hawk. When a weight is put upon them they are so arranged mechanically that they cling. Many times I have wasted half a box of shells shooting a dead one down from the face of a cliff or a tree. They hang like glue."

I looked closely at the backward curving claws. They were

indeed designed for the flashing upward climb I had seen many of them make up the rocky clefts, needle-point talons, sharp and about the size of those of a bobcat, four front, and one inclined back.

"Miguell" said José, "You can have the iguanas. If I take them home, my wife will want a pair of shoes made."

I laughed, thanking him for the offer, determined I would get my own iguanas. I suggested going on up the canyon. José demurred in true Mexican fashion. It was the hour of siesta. As there was no beer handy, he would just have a nap. So saying, he grinned up at the crazy Canadian who had not yet learned that "tomorrow will come as surely as yesterday," and, leaning his back comfortably against the cliff face, he tilted his sombrero down over his eyes.

"*Buena caza, Miguel,*" he smiled humorously.

I nodded and walked slowly up the canyon thinking about the things I had learned. The tropical sun was beating up the pulse in my forehead, and my lips were dry and dusty as I came around a sharp turn in the narrowing canyon. It looked like a good spot for iguanas. The rocks jutted into the glaring light without a leaf shadow of shade. I sat down on a big rock examining the cliff face ahead of me. There were many fissures in the walls. The logical thing seemed to me to sit there and scan each cleft, each ledge singly, until I was sure there wasn't a big lizard sunning itself in front of my eyes. After a full twenty minutes it paid off. On a ledge about fifty feet away I saw the form of a big head facing toward the sun, in my direction. I watched it until I saw a slight movement and was sure. Slowly I worked my rifle up into the crotch of my shoulder drawing a bead on the big head.

Just as I had the squeeze almost completed, the big lizard's head reared up and twisted quickly. I waited for the fraction of a second when it would turn back, but it was too late. The animal started up the sheer rock face, darting like a foot-chaser firework. Just near the summit I levelled on a running shot and fired. The iguana rolled backward from the wall and tumbled to the ledge upon which it had been resting. It thrashed around like a

miniature alligator, then came down the rest of the way with a dull thud on the dusty ground.

It was kicking and twisting as I walked gingerly up to it. I saw the puncture just behind the head where the bullet had broken the spine and realized the animal was through. Even at that I was leery about picking it up. I banged it on the head with a rock and figured that that was enough. Frankly, I'm not any more cagey about walking up to a grizzly or a moose I have just put down than I was about picking up that first iguana. Eventually it was only twitching, and I carried it by the tail—well down toward the end.

Slowly I edged into the canyon. I saw two more iguanas, but they saw me first and my snap shooting wasn't good enough to take them. A brace of doves flitted up the canyon on the still air, their wings holding my attention. I sat and waited to see if they would come over my way. They lit in a camarones tree, far short. I glanced up the rocky wall, searching its every projecting ledge, looked carefully in the branches of all the surrounding trees, and was about to get up and move along.

About sixty yards away I noticed what seemed to be a deep black fissure in a volcanic boulder. My pulse quickened. It appeared very much like the form of an iguana. There was a pile of medium-sized boulders near at hand into which it could do a quick disappearing act. I leveled the gun sights on the head and squeezed off. The big black lizard toppled off the rock and made for the crannies in the boulder. Disappointed I saw it disappear into the darkness. It looked to be all of two and a half feet in length, the biggest I had seen that day. I moved quietly up the rocks, hoping to see its dead body.

Circling the pile, I saw what looked like a dead twig sticking out between two boulders. Suddenly the twig twitched and I knew it was the tail of an iguana. I sneaked silently up to it and grabbed. There was a terrific tug on the tail, surprisingly strong, and abruptly I wondered if it was the iguana I had wounded or a *perfectly unharmed one*. This last would never do. It was a big hunk of tail I was holding onto, and by the sound of the scratching of claws among the rocks, the lizard was no

less than the big one I had hit. As my rifle was useless to me in one hand, I dropped it for freedom of movement and gave a big yank. The lizard slipped out about six inches, then dug in with all four feet. I was just going to yank again when my eyes caught sight of the big grayish head turned back, jaws wide open, looking right into my face. I felt as if an icicle had been rammed into me. I don't know why I didn't let go. Pig-headed type of Irish I guess.

I got a chance to see most of the body and realized there was no blood on it. *It wasn't my wounded iguana!* This one was fresh as a daisy, but a damn sight angrier and less pretty. I thought "I'll give a good yank, flip it over my head, and bang hell out of its head on a rock." I *thought*.

The darn thing suddenly let go of all fours. My foot slipped, and I fell backward on my backside. I was still holding the iguana by the tail, and it was twisting around like a wild cat in my hands, its open jaws coming within about half an inch of my nose. I couldn't let go of it, for it would drop into my lap. I pushed myself to my feet as its claws raked my arm, and with a desperate twist, swung the animal against the big boulder. It kicked savagely, and I swung again, and again, suddenly realizing that it was stunned or dead. Then, I dropped it. It was a real beauty with a gunmetal skin crossed with a geometric pattern.

I thought, "I'd like another one like that for a pair of shoes and purse for Thelma, my wife." Eventually, I picked up the one I had first shot, and with the one I had wrestled, I started past the big rock pile. There was something twitching between the boulders and suddenly I realized it was the iguana I had shot. It was lying dead and still except for nerve twitchings, almost in plain view. Picking up the third lizard, I started proudly down the canyon.

José roused himself at my footsteps and asked me how the hunting went. I took the three lizards from behind me nonchalantly. He whistled appreciatively.

"You got two big ones!" he exclaimed. "Not many that big around here. Let me look at the skins."

He examined them closely, turning the one I had caught by mistake over and over.

"Where did you shoot this one?" he asked curiously.

"Oh," I said in my best offhand manner, "That one? Oh, I just stalked him and got him with my hands."

José's eyes opened wide and he took on a respectful demeanor. But, he looked again for a bullet hole and still found none. Finally he spoke.

"You must be very quick, Miguel," he allowed. "You hunt him maybe the same way you hunt grizzly bears. No?"

There didn't seem to be any answer to that one I'm afraid I must have told one of my taller tales to José when we were in our cups at the cantina one evening.

I took the lizards home with misgiving. José had said to be sure to sun cure and salt the skins and he would pick them up next week end when he came down from Mexico City. He left infinite instructions with my wife as to the correct Mexican manner of cooking the iguana filets, then with a good round of excellent iced "Cuba libre," he departed. I was glad he left then, for I was facing with a squeamish stomach the task of skinning my trophies.

Thelma said, "Don't you dare bring that filthy reptile meat into this house. I'll throw out the pots and pans if you put any of it in them!"

Another "Cuba libre" encouraged me to go onward, and taking the big iguanas down, I began to skin them. As I worked at it I was surprised by their cleanliness. The skin was as tough as leather, but the flesh looked exactly like that of a spring chicken. And, there wasn't the slightest odor from the intestines. That is more than anyone can say for chickens, grouse, or especially, wild ducks, which are the stinkiest things on earth to clean.

The meat when cleaned out was clean and fresh looking, with little lines and patches of golden fat on it I was getting up my nerve to eat it. I decided to put it in the Frigidare overnight with the idea of getting the gardener's wife to cook some for me in exchange for the balance of the meat. She agreed.

The following day my wife noticed the filets in the cooler

BOOK I : *Hunting*

and asked me where the rabbit had come from. I told her that one of our friends had been hunting and had brought a couple of rabbits over while she was out shopping. She said "How nice. Would you like it southern, deep fried for supper? I just feel like some wild rabbit."

I nodded nonchalantly, pretending I was preoccupied with my writing, feeling just a little like a wild rabbit myself. Deep fried, with fresh pineapple crushed over it, fried rice and avocado pear salad, with oven-baked potatoes completed one of the most luscious dinners I have had. The meat was positively succulent and as tender as a fat spring chicken. My wife nodded her approval.

"Lovely rabbit," she smiled, "Just like chicken."

I'm afraid I was a little rude. Something caught in my throat (a chuckle I think) and I sneezed over the baked potato. After I got over my fit of laughter, Thelma eyed me suspiciously.

"Where did you bury those iguanas?" she asked abruptly. I fumbled for a logical place. She started to laugh herself. "You—you—well, you darling old fool! I might have known it! They were very lovely eating. When are you having my shoes made up out of the skins?"

It was my turn to feel sheepish. But what can a guy do when his wife is such a good sport about things. Heck! Get her shoes. She can't run around barefoot!

Anyway, I shot iguanas again and found them altogether worthy of being called game. Try them sometime. You'll find them sporting and worthwhile hunting.

12 : *Rabbits*



THERE ARE probably more rabbit hunters in the world than all other kinds of hunters combined. In the first place, there are probably more rabbits, more widely spread over the face of the globe, than any other game species. And it robs the rabbit not a whit of his popularity to call him a near-rodent, of the genus *Sylvilagus*, with many cousins in other continents and regions, but in our part of the world commonly called cottontail. He is related to the tiny flying squirrel and to the South American capybara, which attains the size of a small pig. The rabbit has come to be a jocose reference to fecundity, and not without cause. It can exist in any climate, beset by all manner of predators, and feed on seemingly barren lands. And it produces young in thirty days several times a year. These facts would seem to assure us of plenty of its kind for future hunting. As a game animal, the rabbit can be almost as cagey as any other species that is hunted.

I remember that, while I was living in California, a great, beautiful red Irish setter was entirely spoiled for anything by the cunning of cottontails. Big Red was owned by a neighbor who worked in the city and paid little attention to his dog. I saw the big setter come sailing across our lawn in pursuit of a roving cottontail one sunny day. He was going hell-bent-for-election, his big strides taking his front legs back through the

rear ones, permitting him to gain nose-to-tail, when the bunny took a sudden swerve up the edge of the sagebrush and *another cottontail* spun out along the open field. Big Red hit the trail of the fresh rabbit without missing a beat. About one hundred yards farther along, the rabbit hit the sage, and another one sped along the edge of the field with Big Red in unretarded pursuit.

It struck me as funny, as I watched the setter some three square acres away pound around the curve of the field and finally disappear. By that time he was on his third or fourth bunny, but *he didn't know it*. The field of alfalfa was sown right up to the sharp rise of the foothills, hedged by sage and cactus. The rabbits kept it cut about six to ten feet from the bushes, almost like a roadway.

The following day when I saw Big Red coming down the drive I petted him. Suddenly he was off like a shot—he had seen a rabbit on the edge of the field. I called him, but it was no use. I saw him come back several days in a row and went to see his owner, who tied him up for a week but didn't do anything about breaking him. I left six months later, and every day up to the time of my departure, Big Red lit out after the rabbits along that field edge, and every day about sundown he came back lathered up and goofy looking. The rabbits had driven him loco, and for good reason, because, to my knowledge, he never caught one. I had seen them get him started along the long line of the field, then hardly wait until he was around the next bush before they hopped out and started eating again. It was a case of Bugs Bunny multiplied and made louder and funnier.

Although I have never seen a rabbit use that trick on a coyote, I have reason to believe that rabbits do. Many times I have seen rabbit tracks in the snow with a predator's tracks after them, then suddenly there are two sets of rabbit tracks separating, with the predator obviously following the fresh ones.

A dog, or two dogs that have been worked together, will usually bring the hunter more rabbit stew, particularly during the daytime. A good dog will run the rabbit in a circle toward the hunter, while a poor one will at least rout the bunnies out of



the cover. In the latter case, the hunter has to be just as good and as quick a shot as he is on birds, perhaps better. The flight of a game bird is pretty regular in pattern, with variations according to the type of bird being hunted, but the flight of a rabbit is about as regular as pretzel made by a drunken baker. You can't depend on any particular jump, trot, path, or direction. The rabbit may run in a straight line for a hundred yards away from you, but he may just as likely run between your legs, and again, he may even sit until you go and pick him up by the ears. If there are obstacles in his path, he may go over, under, or around them, and more than one stump has taken the blast of a shotgun that was intended for a rabbit.

There are three principal species of wild rabbits and hares (*Lepus townsendii*, for example) in North America, the cottontail, the snowshoe hare (principally *Lepus americanus*) and the jack rabbit. I'll never forget my first experience with a jack rabbit, nor the ignominy of it either. We were living not far from Los Angeles at that time, a short distance from a kangaroo farm. I was familiar with kangaroos from my boyhood, having been taken regularly to a park that had some. Several of us were lolling down a California highway in a Model-T Ford when I saw what appeared to be three "baby kangaroos" standing under the overhang of the orange trees. Without waiting for the car to stop, I lit out after the kangaroos, hoping to capture one of them for a pet. I was amazed at the end of about one hundred yards to find myself already two hundred yards behind. When I got back to the jalopy the froshes were laughing fit to bust.

"Gees," I grinned feebly, "I never saw a baby kangaroo run like those sonsuvbitches did."

There were roars of laughter, and finally a lanky lad said in a typical drawl from guess-where, "Son, them was Texas jack rabbits, and they're probably back in Dallas right now."

Any jack rabbits I saw later I took the precaution to nail down with a chunk of lead *before* going after them. And I tell the story to illustrate in my own way the difference between a cottontail and a jack. If you haven't seen one or the other you will always be able to tell the difference when you do.

The rabbit family lives very much on vegetable growth—almost anything edible from grass to green bark—and I have noticed very little sign of them in the heavily timbered areas. Their preference seems to be largely for quite open-grass, or meadow, country with good hedges of brush or deciduous growth. In the northern part of British Columbia they abound in the farmers' fields, as well as in burnt-over country with lots of fallen slash lying on the ground. In Mexico, they seem to favor the arroyos, where the brush and cactus are thicker, while in Texas they seem to be everywhere. Cottontails that I have taken in Mexico were not appreciably different from the summer-hued rabbit near the Arctic Circle, except that there is no apparent change in color in the south whereas there is in the north. Never having had a Mexican rabbit alongside a Canadian rabbit, they therefore seem to me to be the same.

That true Northerner, the snowshoe hare or rabbit—which I'm led to believe is a hare (*Lepus americanus*), not a rabbit—provided me with one of the most prolonged thrills and worst scares I ever enjoyed whilst hunting. I was plenty big enough to pack a gun, but hardly old enough. Naturally, like all young hunters, I wanted to kill me a bear, no less. With that in mind, I hied myself deep into the timber at the back of our cottage, near a well-known patch of huckleberries. Not too familiar with the habits of bears or snowshoe rabbits, I found a bedding spot under a big stump. The lair was near water, with very dense salal bush and other undergrowth, just at the edge of the timber which bordered the huckleberry patch. There were copious quantities of loose bear dung on the surrounding acres, so I presumed that this semi-cave under the roots of the tree was the bear's den. "What better place to beard the bruin?" I remember romancing as I settled down to await the return of the bear. It seemed a fine place. The bear could come at me only from the front I'd blast him down!

Well—about half an hour (it seemed like days) later I heard the thunderous approach of my bear. There was a hell of a scuffling of leaves off to the left, a sort of snuffling sound. Silence. I had my trusty .32-20 Winchester up, ready at my shoulder.

Surely I would kill the bear with *one* shot! The ponderous tread of heavy feet crushed the leaves to the front of me. It seemed not ten feet away, yet the bushes were too thick to permit me to see even that distance. Suddenly I had misgivings. A bear was known to travel half a mile after being hit by a rifle slug. Meanwhile the scuffle of leaves and snapping of twigs proceeded around behind me. I sweated blood, because I knew the bear had scented me and was going to come into his den from a secret passage. The next five minutes were pure agony as I waited for the bear to rush me from *all* directions!

Suddenly, right in front of me, the crushing of leaves became thunderous. Strain as I would, I couldn't make out the mountainous form of the bear. By this time the shakes had shaken themselves out of me. I didn't have a good healthy shiver left in me, even though my hands were as cold as ice, and so were my feet. The sounds assailed my ears, and my hair rose up on my scalp like a new scrub brush. It was only five feet away and coming around the end of a big fallen log. I set myself and trained the bead on the log end. I'd hit the first thing that showed around the end! I'd blast the nose off the bear, then shove nine more slugs into it (if God was with me) *before it got to me*. I wondered if they would ever find my body? The nose came around the edge of the log, and my rifle blasted so loud in the silence that the forest seemed to quiver around me. I fired again and again. But there wasn't anything to fire at.

My first slug had hit a snowshoe rabbit dead center on the tip of the nose, spread, and torn the whole body apart, so that all that was left was the mangled hindquarters, and those big hind feet for which the animal gets its name. Who says there isn't any thrill to hunting rabbits?

Like most of the herbivorous, furred animals, the rabbit leaves a round ball of dung, somewhat like a small ebony bead. On dry or hard ground the tracks of hare or rabbit are too insignificant for the hunter to be able to follow, but the marks on snow are unmistakable. Usually in soft snow there are quite heavy prints set at an angle to each other, often with a tiny, almost indistinguishable dab, centering them from the action

of front legs, because most of the weight comes on the oversized back legs, which, not incidentally, provide the bulk of the meat for deep frying or stewing. In snow, rabbits usually go from cover to cover, seldom staying long in the open.

The rabbit, very much like the grouse, relies on its camouflage coloring to save it from harm. Often it will crouch down behind the smallest cover, sitting with its head pointed away from the stranger, its eyes, which are set well back in the sides of the head, eying the intruder with timid glance. If the hunter feels he is coming close upon a fresh trail, or has reason to believe there are rabbits in the cover he is approaching, it is often wise for him to move to within a few feet of either, then remain silent. The result is often a nervous scuffling of the rabbit's back feet as it sets itself for a quick takeoff. I have noticed while hunting them that this cessation of movement by myself invariably moved the rabbit after some minutes.

The rabbit seems much like the deer in its habits, in that it is a nocturnal feeder and traveler, spending much of its daylight life in cover. When crossing very tangled stretches of fallen and burnt timber, I have many times flushed rabbits right from under my feet as I stepped over logs. Examination of these sites usually showed a cup-shaped nest or resting spot under the log, still warm to the touch. During the day (except in California and other temperate states), rabbits were seldom in the open unless being chased by something. Often while crossing and recrossing the continent, the wheels of my car have knocked down luckless cottontails and jack rabbits, always at night. Traveling fast and almost upsetting and ditching the car a couple of times, I finally decided that rabbits had the better of night life and should be given a clear road, without any interference from me.

The time for hunting them without a dog seems to be the evening, just as the sun goes down. Rabbits seem to begin to hop out from every type of shelter at that time, with a decided preference for the quieter roads as their means of travel. I remember one such evening hunt very well.

Three of us had traveled a thousand miles north in British Columbia with moose, caribou, and grizzly as our avowed quar-

ry. Camped on the edge of François Lake, we were storm-bound by raging waters for three days. We had been sitting impatiently in camp for two days waiting for the weather to break, when I decided to hike along one of the old farm roads. I saw profuse signs of cottontails. The itch was getting me, but I hated to admit it. Moping over the fire and getting my backside warmed, I looked over at Del Escott, who was eying the flickering flames with a dreamy, far-away look. I reckoned my nerve and ability to withstand criticism of a so-called big game hunter, and finding them in order, put the proposition in words.

"Del," I said half-heartedly, "I don't suppose you would like to go out after some rabbits."

He looked up at me with a low smirk broadening his generous countenance. For about ten seconds he stared at me, stewing in my own suggestion, then with a gasp he said, "Well, I'll be damned! This is the first time I've ever had a guy read my mind. Let's go."

Two minutes later a couple of eager big-game hunters sneaked out of camp with a couple of shotguns in hand and guilty grins on their faces. Del confided to me. "You know, I thought you were too big for rabbit huntin'. I've been bustin' go for two days.

I made an obvious reply, "So have I, but I figured you wouldn't be interested."

We picked it just right. The sun was simmering in the stew of red clouds on the blackening pot of the horizon. The snow, looking like pink frosting, was sparkling and crusty underfoot. About two hundred yards out of camp Del busted a big cottontail buck, and a few yards farther a younger female. We followed the farm road for about a mile, and rabbits kept getting out on the edge of it all along. I was using No 2 goose shot and not doing too well. Lots of shootin' but no eatin'.

Del had forked off into a field with a good hedge around it, and as I came to a curve in the road, I saw one head pop out from a bunch of bushes. I leveled and squeezed off quickly. All of a sudden the roadbed seemed covered with hopping rabbit forms and tossing bodies. Out of the *melée* I picked up two dead

rabbits and grabbed another wounded one by the ears as it hit for the thickets. Three rabbits with one charge of No. 2 buck-shot. It was the best rabbit shot I ever made. We took ten rabbits back to camp that evening, and were as proud as if we had bagged a buck apiece.

In the matter of guns for bunnies, I prefer a shotgun, if I'm meat-hunting. The irregular take-off and the speed rabbits can attain in a short distance give good practice for the scatter-gunner. Any gauge will do, but I prefer a shot not less in pellet size than No. 4, preferably No. 2. The pellets are large enough to break the comparatively light bone structure. If a man wants to practice rifle shooting, there is nothing better to try out on than a running rabbit, or one sitting, at one hundred yards.

Many people fear tularemia, or "rabbit fever," and much has been written about the disease which would scare off a hunter. An actual survey showed that only 5 per cent of this rather rare disease in persons resulted from rabbit hunting, that flies in districts where the disease is prevalent were a far greater menace. The survey also showed that tularemia is common to quail, grouse, most upland birds in fact, as well as deer and other big game animals, *ticks* being well-known carriers of the disease. A person can eat a well-cooked rabbit or other animal which is infected without any risk of contracting the disease. The principal vehicle by which tularemia gets started is a cut or abrasion upon which the infected blood of the animal killed has become smeared. It is wise, when cleaning *any animal*, to seal off open cuts. The rabbit then, is neither more nor less of a menace than any other animal.

The cooking of rabbits depends a great deal upon the age of the animal. If it is an old buck, I'd say nothing less than a few hours of stewing with good vegetables will do. Fricasseeing or frying in deep fat, as for Southern fried chicken, makes excellent provender of young animals, but for myself I like a deep-baked, pastry-crust rabbit pie, preferably with a steeped wine sauce. In fact you can do almost anything with a rabbit that you can with a chicken, and quite a lot of chicken that is consumed may have had long hair and floppy ears.

One last bit of warning. If you have a young daughter like mine, don't bring rabbits into the house while she is awake. It is a job pulling rabbits out from between a little girl's clinging arms while she dozes off to sleep.





PART 2

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*Game Birds*



13 : *Pheasants*



THE PHEASANT was invited to North America, and he stayed to dinner—that is dinner for thousands of sportsmen. Gunning for pheasant has been an American pastime since the first recorded birds were introduced by Governor Wentworth of New Hampshire in the year 1790, and, brother, what a pastime! Watching a longtail spurt from the stubble or brake, you immediately think of a fiery colored comet as it whooshes skyward, vari-hued wings flailing, head shot forward, glistening in the frosty or sunny air. Then, when it levels, swerves, spreads its wings, and soars like the guided missile it is, you look at the smoke eddying from your hot gun barrel and wonder just how in tarnation you could have missed that one. That is pheasant shooting.

You can depend on a pheasant to do one of several things when you see it and it sees you. Trouble is, it is hard to know *which one* of its tricks it will pull. A pheasant will suddenly squat in the grass and let you walk right up to it. You don't want to shoot a sitting bird, so you decide to throw a stick at it. You bend over to pick up the stick. There is a whoosh of wings, and you don't even get your gun up before the bird hits the woods two hundred yards away. How did the pheasant figure out what *you* would do? I don't know. Maybe he got it from his Chinese ancestry, or his Mongolian or Japanese—or even his English ancestry.

As you may have gathered, the pheasant came as a foreigner to our soil, a hybrid bird, a mixture of cussedness, speed, daring, a flyer and a runner both. He was devised that way by man, not by nature. The Greeks of the time of Alexander the Great raised pheasants for food. The birds were bred into phases and mutations and intermingled with other blood for the next thousand or so years. Then, in Great Britain, some of the boys who had acquired a few shekels and servants and had been banged on the head with the flat of a sword got tired of building castles. A new-fangled thing was devised with sulphur and saltpeter in it which went off with a loud bang and sometimes killed a bird on the wing. Some of the boys, who had got quite good with this old piece of drampipe filled with horseshoe nails, decided the local product, the solemn-hued grouse, wasn't a fitting fowl to be taken by men in silk britches, plumed hats, and a new knight-hood to boot. They wanted something with splendor and grace to provide a real sporting target for their new "fowling pieces," and to give added attraction to their dining and banquet tables. The stringily built, long-necked pheasant which came from around Canton and the Yantze Valley in China appealed to them, especially since it was colored like a peacock. But some farseeing sportsman decided that, although it had color and "game" qualities, such as getting fast away when it was scared from a field, it wasn't heavy enough in the breast for culinary purposes.

Came a long period of experimentation. The Mongolian ringneck was spliced with the Chinese pheasant. Guinea fowl were cut in, and out, as were silver, golden, and Greive's pheasants. Finally, the Chinese pheasant, or *Phasianus colchicus colchicus*, without a ring, the Mongolian pheasant, or *Phasianus c. torquatus*, with a ring neck, and the Japanese pheasant, *Phasianus versicolor*, which was dark greenish in color, were brought to provide the blood lines for a very finely combined bird. Just so, with subtle and several other variations, the ringnecked pheasant came into its own. It was imported into this wonderful new land of ours and became an all-round game bird, almost as synonymous with hunting in the New World as the turkey, which is a suborder of the pheasant family.

So, the next time you pick up a pheasant after you have matched your shot with its trajectory, and to find it quite a grayish color, or bright yellow, or even orange, instead of green like the last one you shot, the criss-crossed lines give the reason. Too, as early as 1880, Judge O. N. Denny shipped a flock of true Chinese pheasants into the Willamette Valley in Oregon, and they bred so fast that in a few years fifty thousand of them were shot in the first open season. Other fanciers have bred in varied strains, but no one has improved on the hybrid ringneck. He's a bird of sagacity and perspicuity.

My acquaintance with this noble specimen came early. He was sailing over the tops of one-hundred-foot fir trees at the edge of deeply forested mountains, an unbelievable place for what is supposed to be an open and bushy plains bird. It was more than fifteen years later that I shot my first pheasant, and I hope one of the last things I'm allowed to do on this ridge of sunshine is take, pluck, roast, and eat another of his kind.

Perhaps the most mystifying thing about a pheasant is to see it land in a flat stubble field, with not a blade of growth more than four inches in height, squat down, and disappear! I remember one such bird that came hell-bent-for-election over a small orchard, folded its wings and hit the stubble, as I thought, stone dead. It lit about twenty-five yards from me, in a perfectly flat field that had been cut as low to the ground as a mower will take it down. I ran across the lawn-like surface expecting to pick up the bird, because there had been a shot just before it sailed over the trees from the fields. I was no stranger to pheasant hunting, and my eyes are supposed to be keen to movement, but when I got to the spot where the pheasant hit, all I saw there was a scuffed spot of dry earth, *not a sign of the bird*.

My companion came up almost at the same instant, having stayed back a second or two in order to shoot the bird if it got up. He couldn't believe his eyes either. That bird had hit the shelterless stubble and in some manner had contrived to shift into a dead run from a bullet-like flight. Although it was almost three feet long and a good twelve inches high when standing up, it literally vanished into the ground, or thin air, as far as we were

concerned. We never at any time saw any movement on the flat ground.

Several months later I found out why. I was after the wily ringneck with a couple of other hunters and a dog. The springer bitch belonging to a friend had a good nose and was working the end of a field about two hundred yards from me. I'd given my field a quick going over, in order to get out beyond the dog and the other two fellows if they put up a pheasant but missed it. The springer's rear end started to wiggle so hard that even at two hundred yards I knew she was on a close scent. Figuring that at that distance she'd put it up for them, I leaned on the barb wire to watch the shot.

Perhaps ten seconds passed, when out of the corner of my eye I saw a movement in the thin bare stubble. I thought it was a muskrat scooting along for cover, except that it was traveling faster than any rat ever went. It hit the swing of the rain-flattened plow furrow, and shot under my nose along the fence so quickly that I had hardly enough time to recognize it as a cock pheasant. I never did get a gun on it, but I'll never forget how that bird was moving. Crouched so close to the ground that it looked flat in shape, every feather pressed tight to its body, tail down in the furrow, its legs seemed to be working on the bottom ends only, going like the spokes of a runaway flywheel. No rabbit, in my humble opinion, could have outrun that bird. It was a gun-wise pheasant who knew if it hit the air it would hit the dust.

Five minutes later the bitch worked right over to me in that same furrow. When I told the other men what had happened, the owner of the dog got mad. He said no pheasant could outsmart his springer. Well, I dunno. I coulda swore a pheasant was the only thing that had a long tail, bright mottled feathers, green, iridescent shoulders, ring neck and scarlet and green hued head. I can be wrong. But apparently that springer wasn't, even if he was following the same furrow *five minutes late*. I think he was a top-flight dog to be so close to that particular running ringneck.

The moral behind all of this seems to me to be: Never watch

the ground around where you see a pheasant hit. Watch the edge of the field, the bushes, or corn stalks, in order to see where he leaves the field.

Like every other pheasant hunter, I have been able to put that knowledge to use. Just as the cock hits the cover for which he is heading, he will usually give a flip of his wings which speeds his rocketing run right into the depths, lifting him off the ground momentarily so that you can see him plainly.

You may wonder where to find pheasants. Actually you will only find them where the game departments or some sportsmen in the territory have put them. In many areas they have to be restocked each year, and on that account are perhaps the most costly single game animal on the whole list. It sometimes takes years to get the birds acclimatized to the wild surroundings into which they are introduced, and hard winters bring them into the farmers' chicken pens, where quite often they succumb to coccidiosis, Newcastle disease, and other domestic fowl ailments, if not to the rifles and shotguns of the farmers, many of whom consider them nothing but pests. Because pheasants eat insects, thousands of them die each year, particularly in orchard country, from the terrifically potent poisonous sprays used to kill various bugs.

I think the largest populations of pheasants I have seen have been in southern Alberta, in the states of Idaho, Utah, Washington, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Oregon, but particularly in Idaho, where much of the land is rolling and brushy, with good water, lots of grain, fruit, and tubers. As a matter of fact I could have picked up half a dozen freshly killed birds on the highway in two hours driving in that state, and I have seen probably a hundred carcasses in a day in varying stages of decay. Just why a pheasant, grouse, or chicken will suddenly dash from good cover into the path of a speeding car I don't think anyone has figured out.

The best possible breeding grounds are in temperate to warm climates, with not too high rainfall, lots of grass, corn, or low growth, bordered with deciduous or coniferous trees, and preferably near water. Pheasants do not thrive in arid or extremely

dry country, unless along river banks. And unlike grouse they will freeze by the hundreds on top of the snow, instead of digging in where body warmth would insure their survival. Perhaps their two worst enemies are frozen snow and a wet nesting season, the latter because the young are frail and take some time to forage well for themselves. Moreover, I have heard many breeders say that a hen pheasant is the worst mother in the world. This may be owing to her hybrid origin. After all you can't have a prima donna and a good Hausfrau in the same woman—or not very often.

I have noticed that pheasants and ducks cross over into the same areas, that is, around rivers, lake edges, marshes, and ponds. Many times, while sneaking out into the marshes, I have had a pheasant spin out from under my feet just at the edge of the reeds, but it was usually after crossing a good sized field or open range before arriving at the water. This would seem to put them often in quite open landscape near water.

A couple of years back, when two of us were crossing through some very dry sagebrush country in the car, we suddenly hit a meandering stream and followed it for several miles. There was fairly heavy bush growth along the stream, a few yards of browned off grass on either side of the water, the odd clump of cottonwoods, or poplar trees, then the sharply rising, dry adobe hills, with sparse cactus and good growths of sage brush. A couple of times I thought I saw pheasants, but at the rate we were traveling I couldn't be too sure.

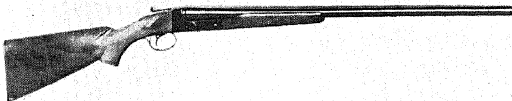
As we rounded a bend, I saw a most lovely cock sitting on the branch of a tree. Yelling to my partner to stop the car, I was told we were in Indian reserve territory, quite near a big pheasant farm, which was a game preserve. He kept on driving. As we rounded the next bend we were stopped by the game warden, whom I asked if the area was closed to hunting. He smiled and admitted that the west side of the road was the boundary, that only the east side was Indian reserve

"Pheasants getting you?" he asked amiably.

"They sure are!" I agreed. "How'd you know?"

"They get everybody," he said. "It beats all hell how they





*Reading from the top:* WINCHESTER MODEL 21 double-barreled shotgun with single selective trigger, in 12-, 16-, and 20-gauge; BROWNING SUPERPOSED shotgun, with ventilated rib; STEVENS MODEL 311 double-barreled shotgun; REMINGTON MODEL 870AP, slide-action repeating shotgun; REMINGTON MODEL 48 autoloading shotgun, with ventilated rib.



*Ringnecked Pheasant*: the cock of the walk among North American game birds, he runs like a horse, flies with surprising speed, and challenges comparison with any other feathered game.



*Above: massive flight of ruffed grouse, one of the most sporting of game species*

*Below: dusky or blue grouse, the big bird that tries to make you think it's a knot on a pine tree*





*Above:* Canada geese on still waters; *below:* a rare hunting day—eight Canada honkers and two mallards taken in Oklahoma by Dan Mitchell, Bruce Wallace, Dale Johnston, and Dean Hodgden.





*Green-winged Teal*: snapped immediately after the retrieve by Wallace Hughes, the noted naturalist and bird portraitist. Pass shooting of teal classes with the world's fastest sport, especially on a windy day.



*Undisputed truth: the hunting man's best friend is his dog. Above: Juanita Mahaffey's eloquent recording of Claude Beeson's setters, a fine double-barrel shotgun, and the day's bag of bobwhites; below: my springer patiently posing with two brant and a slide-action gun in the snow.*





*Above:* Massa Bobwhite himself, not batting an eyelid



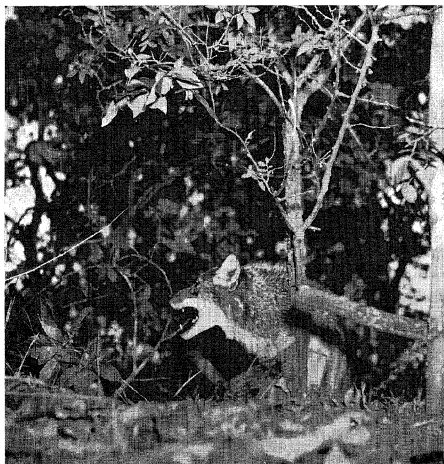
*Left:* bobwhites making a fast getaway on foot in thick cover

*Below:* a fine mixed bag of bobwhites (left) and scaled quail (center and extreme right) taken in the high-plains country of western Oklahoma





*Above:* wild turkeys crossing a ridge; *below:* their most persistent enemy, the coyote. Wild turkeys are big game, weighing from fifteen to more than twenty-five pounds.





stay on the east side of the road. I have had to take in a couple of boys because they couldn't resist the temptation to shoot. Well, good luck on your way south."

"South, hell!" I grinned, and turned to my partner. "Come on, Johnny, let's go back."

The game warden gave me a hard look, and Johnny looked at me as if I had gone nuts. Something had occurred to me. Those pheasants stayed on the east side of the creek during the day because of water and feed, but we were now *at evening time*. As soon as we were out of earshot of the game warden, Johnny gave me an ear drubbing with all the choice words he could think up.

"You silly goon," he noted. "Are you *looking* for trouble? That game warden is a nice fellow. He told you it was closed territory, that he had taken in other guys. What's the matter with you? If you take a bird past there, you can damn well walk with it! I won't have any illegal game in my car. You gone crazy all of a sudden?"

"Nope," I said. "Look, you and I were headed for that spot fifty miles south to hunt pheasants, where every guy and his brother are shooting. We can't make it tonight and still get a decent shoot, can we?"

"No, but—" he sputtered.

"Trust me until I go wrong," I asked. "Then *if I do*, you can personally hand me over to the game warden. Stop just at the bend up there."

"Hell," he exploded. "The game warden can see you without his glasses right from here."

But he stopped the car and got out at my insistence. I pointed to the country ahead of us. The roadbed followed the stream, taking advantage of the lower, flat grassland. On the west side of the road, the clumps of trees hedged it continuously for as far as the eye could see. Johnny twigged to what I meant. It was evening, with the sun behind the hills, the time when the pheasants get out of the feed and water and go to roost in the trees. They had to fly to the open-season side of the road in order to bed down for the night.

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As we made our first hundred yards along the bank edging the road, I saw the cock pheasant I had first seen leave its tree roost. I dropped it right on our side of the road as it made for the trees. Johnny and I took four birds in half an hour, strolling along the road waiting occasionally for the birds to get up and go to roost. It was fast shooting but it was open. The birds were cagey, for we missed two for every one we took.

As we drove through the Game Station the warden grinned. "You fellows should have had six birds," he said, and pointing at me with a hard-eyed look, he stated: "I sure wish to hell all the hunters were as lousy a shot as you are. It would give the birds a chance."

I grinned smugly anyway. I had my birds cleanly, legally, and I knew he had been watching us through his glasses, because I'd seen them flash in the low sunlight just as we started.

The reason I tell you that story is to show you the habits of the birds, not the psychology of game wardens. Invariably pheasants will leave corn and grain fields just around sundown, heading for the nearest clump of trees to roost. They will usually take water just before that, and like grouse, they also seem to come out on the roads. The reason I give for their coming on the roads is that most of our roads are constructed with gravel and crushed rock. They take in a lot of gravel in order to provide the grinding agents for digesting the food in their gizzards while they roost.

I remember one other thing I learned when hunting pheasants, especially where there were many gunners with dogs in the fields. I had been out all morning without a dog and had been skunked entirely. The fellows I saw all said the pheasant hunting in the valley was shot out for the season. Only the odd hunter had a cock pheasant hung to his belt or its tail sticking out of a game pocket. One of the men was mad.

He said, "It's those damn farmer kids, plinking them with .22 shots out of season. Last year we had plenty of pheasants, and there were plenty around even after the hunting season. We liberated a couple of thousand early this year, too. I'm going to report this situation to the game department."

I sat down for a while and thought about pheasants. They head for cover when there is a lot of shooting. There wasn't much cover in the fields, because it was rich river delta and cultivated right up to the barbed wire. Pheasants like tall corn, too, for cover, but most of it had been harvested and put in the silos. *Where* would they go? I didn't believe the farmers would be taking them out of season. It isn't usual. A farmer has too much to do, and besides many of them lease the privileges of their fields to clubs and groups. More than that, the farmers themselves were squawking. Another thing, I had seen quite a bit of dung and scratching in the fields that led me to believe there were still pheasants around.

About a mile away I saw the rise of the ridges coming right out of the plains, ridges covered with fir, pine, maples, and alders. As I approached the trees closely I heard that strained screech of a cock pheasant crowing. My heart beat faster. The cock was answered not once but several times I started to climb the ridges. Sure enough. I hadn't got three hundred feet in elevation before I downed my first bird. I saw sixteen shootable cocks in less than a mile. I say saw. I hit only three and missed the rest. The shooting was between trees, because the birds sailed up and down like grouse, hitting the deeper brush and sometimes going right in against the trunk of a densely needled fir. They had been wised up in the first few days of the season to the hunters and dogs, and had retreated to the forest for shelter.

When I came out with my three birds (which was the bag limit) I was questioned by every hunter on the road. Where did I get them? Where was my dog? I told one of them that I knew well where the birds were. He didn't believe me, so I just laughed foolishly and explained to the rest of them I'd been lucky. Why the heck no one else thought of it I don't know. It was tough climbing and very difficult shooting, but the birds were plentiful.

For pheasant hunting generally, I think a dog, any dog, is better than none. He will put up the birds where you can shoot them. The natural ability of the bird to run like greased lightning on the ground, and the fact that a dog will put it up for shooting both make for better sporting chances. Besides, the pheasant

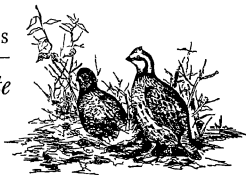
doesn't always kill easily. These birds are big and will run, even with two broken wings, for a long distance. If you have a dog, he will get them, even if they hide in the deepest grass, where you couldn't possibly find them. I remember one such big, four-pound cock bird I killed when I saw it run for the edge of a marsh. It appeared that he wasn't going to get up, apparently because he seemed to be trailing a wing.

When I examined him after bringing him down, I saw the main wing bone was broken off at the first, or outer joint, the bone protruding and glazed over with blood and dirt. When I came on the scene, the injury was at least two days to a week old, but the bird was still living and heavy-bodied, a noble and courageous speedster gone lame. He had clung to life, feeding and surviving in an area where hunting with dogs was in full swing.

The subject of guns for pheasant has often been debated, but any shotgun will do, even the lighter .410 with a three-inch load in the hands of a cracking good shot. The birds get up fast but are not very hard to hit when in open flight, flying as they do, pretty much to a pattern. They present a big wing surface, going over thirty inches spread, and a cross shot is good if they are leveling down. They set their wings, then coast for several yards after the first quick, pumping flight. I use No. 4 to No. 2 shot for them, because they have a quite heavy bone structure, and the heavier shot will break bones and penetrate. Many men may like the lighter shot, No. 6, for example, which gives a wide pattern in a modified-choke or cylinder-bore shotgun. I notice these men usually take their birds on the rise. I like the heavy shot in a full-choke barrel in order to reach the bird more slowly, just as it straightens out into level flight.

You know the old saw, "Just give me the piece opposite the backbone." Well, it applies double force to breast of pheasant, at home or in an expensive club. Pheasant is worth the price you have to pay to get it. In my opinion, roast pheasant breast with or without champagne and caviar is the highest form of eatin' off the hog. The sport of shooting pheasant and the gosh-awful feeling that overcomes you when you pick up the gorgeous array of feathers provide one of the highest thrills of all hunting.

14 : *Quail or Bobwhite*



THE BOBWHITE QUAIL is to me the little champion of the game birds of America, the little fellow whom I'd willingly drop from legal game lists with the least regret. Not because he is not one of the fastest, screwiest flyers; or, when hunted, one of the best runners and wisest birds to take cover, but because of his beauty, friendliness, and good humored song. Many times, when slogging after other game or trudging home disgusted after fishing, I have recalled his cheery words of encouragement, which to me sound like "Cheer up! Cheer up, pal!" I seldom think of the sound "bobwhite," even though it is closer to the notes. I've found the quail family wherever I go, north into British Columbia, east to Maine, south as far as Mexico, and, of course, in great numbers in the Deep South. In California twenty-five years ago, you couldn't walk down an arroyo without scooting up dozens of kinsmen of the bobwhites, valley and mountain quail, in a mile. In Texas last year, I seldom got out of the car without hearing a cheery "*how-deee!*" of scaled quail somewhere off in the chaparral, and in feeding areas, bobwhites were plentiful.

In Caulfeild, B. C., only a few yards from where I sit writing this, I watched many years ago a royal parade genuinely worth seeing. The covey of valley quail came single file out of the salal brush beside the road, orderly as a parade of toy soldiers. The band majordomo even wore a tassel on top of his black, white-

striped hat and strutted with mincing steps. After him filed the hen and her young across the narrow country road, peering carefully to right and left, moving sedately up into the bushes on the other side. I was a kid of ten, whittling a crotch for my slingshot to hunt the mighty willow grouse and "boomers" or "drummers," as we called the blue grouse. I couldn't bring myself to slug the quail with a pebble, as I would willingly have knocked the head off a grouse. Another time, a few years later, I was almost scared pantsless by a covey of quail on Vancouver Island. I was sneaking an illicit smoke, away from my stern aunt's summer cottage, deep along a forest trail. The thundering whirr of sudden wings, as at least twelve of the birds exploded from under my feet, made me think I was being visited by the avenging wrath of God for my dallying with nicotine. I almost swallowed my cigarette. My feet had nearly stepped in the middle of the quail covey in my furtiveness. They were the imported California valley quail. Later, in Mexico, I saw a lighter, more checkered bird which, too, was a quail.

Of the quail family there are seventy species in the Western Hemisphere, but only seven of these species are commonly found north of the border of Mexico. They are bobwhite, masked bobwhite, mountain quail, California (valley) quail, scaled quail, Gambel's quail, and Mearn's quail, all of the suborder *Phasiani*, the family *Odontophoridae*. There are many common names by which they are known, such as valley quail, Texas quail, chaparral chickens, partridge, Arizona bobwhite, cotton top, all of which are good in their respective local uses. Quail are seed and insect feeders, beneficial to the farmer's crops and seldom harmful. I know that the California grape growers often raise Cain about quail eating their grapes, but I hardly think they spoil much of the ultimate wine into which much of the grape crop goes.

It was in California, by the way, not far from the city of Los Angeles, that I shot my first quail, and I'll never forget the plump beauty and surprising heaviness of that bird, nor how many I missed before I got it. Used to shooting grouse, I didn't allow for the quail's amazing quickness of flight, and was utterly

unprepared, moreover, for the covey to flush in all directions from around my feet. With birds suddenly all around the end of my barrel, I'd get set on one, when another would cross my sights, whereat I'd swing on it, thus allowing time for the quail to vanish from sight in thin air, my gun merely exploding harmlessly in the direction of one of the anxious liverspots that floated in front of my eyes.

My hunting companion had a big red setter that could discover a bevy of quail in a rock-bound canyon which appeared incapable of holding a dried-up old horned toad, and he'd snuff them out with exceptional speed, stand on point, and raise them only on orders. The setter looked at me when I missed with only slightly less disgust than he had for a Pomeranian, which I suspect he believed was no dog at all. However, as we came out onto the edge of my friend's orange "ranch," around which wheat was planted in a kind of northern border, I got into line with the birds. They had to rise up from the edge of the sage and fly downhill toward an orchard for cover. In doing this, with the trees about one hundred yards away, they had to stay above the wheat for a few yards. I found if I shot under them on the end dip, they flew right into the shot in a regular flight pattern. We filled our bag the first day of the season and the second. By the end of the week we were lucky to get three fair shots in a day, but the birds hadn't thinned appreciably. They had just become smart. Instead of rising, they would flush in a full, long run, and sometimes the setter would execute a walking (or trotting) point for thirty yards, with his tail straight out, hoping to pin one bird down.

The quail is almost as fine a runner as he is a flier, being considered right up there with the ringneck pheasant in racing qualities. And, it doesn't seem to take much shooting to make the birds learn to stay down out of a man's way. As a matter of fact, the quail and the ringneck have very similar living habits. It is a gallinaceous bird, doing most of its feeding and living on the ground. It must have gravel and fresh water to exist, and some species will perch in trees near a stream or water hole, while others will use ground cover near by.

I remember that in Texas, in what seemed to be desert for hundreds of miles, there was a spot which was teeming with quail. We stopped overnight beside the road and made camp in the open air. The familiar chuckle of the quail seemed to resound from every bush. I trekked back into an arroyo for about half a mile and put up at least six coveys of bobwhites. Deep in the shallow canyon I came upon a couple of small, muddy pools of water, around which the tiny feet of quail webbed an overlapping pattern. Curious about the actions of the birds, I sat back in the shadow of a mesquite bush about thirty yards from one hole. The sun was almost burned out of the day, and the call, and call back, of bebies of quail resounded incessantly in the clear Texas air.

Twenty minutes of motionless silence brought the first covey to the edge of the water to drink. They began to file in to drink in measured numbers from the surrounding sage and cacti, one covey strutting past me like a miniature dawn patrol. Having gabbled with other neighbors at the pool, they ran, walked, and flew up into a patch of trees about one hundred yards away. It taught me a lesson in how to find the birds during hunting season. If you see water, it is not necessarily a sign that there will be quail, but I have found that if you discover quail, you will also discover water.

Of course, in the more northerly latitudes, as in Maine, Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia, water is not difficult to find, but here the birds seem to cling to cultivated areas, particularly at the edges of farm lands. Quail seem to enjoy the country better if the land is gullied and rolling, with small rocky summits and bluffs. They take kindly to modern agriculture, and definitely pay the farmer dividends if he looks after them. As high as 25 per cent of the food taken from quail crops has proved to consist of various insects, most of which are injurious to crops. I don't know how the situation is now, but some years back it was common for a farmer to pay his taxes by the sale of quail-shooting rights to city hunters. If he had taken care of his quail coveys in the early spring, he was sure to get a stiff price for the hunting privilege during the season.



The quail, like the grouse and the pheasant, lives and dies within a mile or so of the spot where he was born. Any migration is very short, tending to be more from a valley to the adjoining hills or mountains. The movement is not of true migration from north to south. This means that farmers or game-club members who want quail shooting have the custody of the birds in trust. Birds native to the country don't need much care, beyond strict enforcement of the game laws. However, in districts in which quail are introduced, the birds must be allowed good cover at the edges of the fields, scattered feed and *gravel* during very hard winters, and open water. Unlike migratory birds, which restore their numbers away from mankind, quail remain in an area until the last cock or hen has been destroyed. This means that there will be no more quail there. None will migrate in return on a migratory flight, as will ducks, geese, and pigeons. The area will have to be restocked.

Because quail are small and beautifully fleshed birds, hunters are prone to slaughter them by the dozen where they are plentiful. My opinion of such a hunter is that he is like "Paw" in John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, who, if he got wealth, wanted a whole tub of grapes just to swish his backside around in. You wouldn't eat caviar by the plateful, and neither should you gorge yourself on quail. If the coveys are small, you should leave the birds another year. Quail will produce from six to sixteen young in a year, depending on species. It doesn't take long to rebuild the shooting if the winters are good. Quail, like pheasants in snow, will squat on the ground and let themselves become snow covered. If a slushy snow falls on top of them with the usual accompanying drop of temperature during the night, they literally freeze in. That is the end of them until the predators, bobcat, coyote, weasels, and house cats dig them out. Incidentally, if a covey of quail moves into your neighborhood, and you own a cat, you won't have quail long.

Of latter years quail seem to have learned the ways of man, and to have become woods birds to a much greater degree than was their earlier, natural tendency. If they are not in the fields when you hunt them, and yet you find their small droppings

or dusting spots, you will be wise to take to the woods. Granted, the shooting is not murderous in the woods, it is still keenly sporting. Trying to pull on an exploding circle of bobwhites in a thicket of trees is enough to make you tear your hair, but when you tip a bird with a shot, you'll have ten times as much chance of finding him as you would in an open field, particularly if you are hunting without a good retriever dog, which I do not recommend.

If you come without warning upon a bunch of quail in their buffalo ring, ready to burst like the feathered bombshells that they are, and you miss widely, don't give up. Even the most hardened bird shots lose their grip at this startling whirr of wings. Sit down on a handy log or rock, after watching the direction that most of the birds have taken. After a few moments, often immediately, the birds will start to call each other. The quail family is gregarious and hates to be broken up. Its members are very regular in their habits.

I remember very well one case in point. For a couple of years we lived near a large natural park abutting the rock-bound coast of the sea. Late one summer I happened to look out my back window into the yard. A California quail jumped up on the post of the tight board fence of my neighbor. Another and smaller bird hopped up to the top of the fence boards. He dropped down into my garden while the first quail bobbed and chirped. Another, another, and another passed the sentry on the post and strutted quickly across the yard. By the time the last bird was over the fence, the first bird had reached the second fence. The sentry hopped down and started across, while the first bird across the garden hopped up on the fence post, whereupon the other birds hopped to the fence top, then dropped down the other side, just as if they were toy soldiers running on an endless belt. They navigated the length of the block katty-corner in this manner, the nine of them arriving at the park edge and disappearing *still in file*. They had come from the vicinity of the ocean in the late evening, where I suppose they had been gravelling their crops on the beach. The time was 8.30 in the evening.

At 8:30 the following evening, out of curiosity, I looked for them. The same nine did exactly the same maneuver. At the end of the summer there were sixteen taking the same course. The following year I counted twenty-seven quail passing the sentries on the post and over each fence. The time of day was in cycle with the hours of daylight left. Such is the regularity of the habits of the quail. You can judge for yourself how you should hunt them.

In the gun department, I advise a very light double-barrel in anything from 12-gauge to .410 caliber, for quick maneuverable shooting, with heavy emphasis on close shooting in the small-bore .410, which is for the cognoscente. I prefer the 20-, 16-, and 12-gauge, using No. 7 to No. 9 shot. The birds kill easily despite stories to the contrary, because the bone structure is necessarily very light in so small a bird. A quail in flight follows a definite pattern, very similar to that of all the *Phasiani* family, although occasionally coveyed birds will swirl around you in so many directions you are apt to become confused. They usually go down from a height into a valley, a common grouse and partridge trait. They hide in shinnery and equally in dense thickets, usually on the ground, and a dog will sometimes have a hard job to find them. By pressing their feathers close to the body, they seem to manage to keep the body scent from escaping, and as they hit cover and sit close, the dog can't pick up scent-tracks to follow as easily as he did before they were disturbed. I don't advise hunting without a good pointer or setter dog, not simply to find and point the birds for you, but to retrieve downed birds and to find the wounded runners, both of which are extremely difficult to locate. Quail of all species have excellent protective coloration which allows a downed bird to merge into his surroundings.

Go easy on quail. By comparison, there used to be as many in the U. S. and Canada as there were buffalo. Like the buffalo, they band together and lend themselves to slaughter, and like the buffalo, once shot out, they become extinct. If you can get your game club to stock them in good farmers' fields, you will be doing the best job you can do for yourself, and the quail.

15 : *Dusky Grouse*



THE HUNTING of dusky, or blue, grouse is spectacular for the first few days of the open season, and I dare say there are more doubles and triples shot at this time than is true of any of the other grouse species. But the phrase "blue grouse" is a misnomer. The bird is also called dusky grouse, pine grouse, pine hen, gray grouse, fool hen, and, to use a colloquial name, "mountain turkey." It is not blue in color, and probably, therefore, the best name is dusky grouse, which has the added advantage of being the naturalists' choice, along with the technical appendage *Dendragapus obscurus obscurus*. I object to the "fool hen" cognomen, as applied to the dusky, or blue grouse. The import of that name does apply to the Hudsonia partridge and Franklin's grouse spruce hen, both of which are much darker, more discernibly marked grouse, with a patch of red over the eye. The dusky grouse is in plumage much like the hen of the ruffed grouse, but darker in color. There is no cockade on the male grouse such as is found in some others of the grouse family.

Grouse, in flight or in the bush, are difficult birds to distinguish through all of their twenty-five species and additional subspecies (with the possible exception of ruffed grouse), and, although I have seen and shot the birds over much of North America, I have difficulty in telling them from one another until they are in my hand. One good point of difference in the dusky grouse is that it will go as high as four pounds in weight and

twenty-two inches in length, thus entitling it to the local cognomen, "mountain turkey." As a matter of fact, I shot one large dusky that went three pounds, fifteen and one quarter ounces, by record, and a local hunting partner of mine talked me out of entering it in the "Game Competition" of the time, stating that the "Franklin River" dusky grouse commonly went over four pounds, eight ounces. I listened to him and did not enter the bird. Strangely enough, my erstwhile friend won the competition with a three-pound, fourteen-ounce bird. Such is the trusting and honorable nature of competitive sportsmen.

When the dusky grouse season opens in British Columbia, there is an unparalleled exodus from the city of Vancouver to the logged-off areas of Vancouver Island. Although the dusky spends much of its natural life in the tall timber and on the tops of mountains, it does in the spring come down to the valleys and level land, there to breed and bring up its numerous coveys. The largest single covey I have seen consisted of eleven almost fully fledged birds. They were feeding in the abundant tangles of wild blackberry vines and tufts of huckleberry bushes. It was the week before the hunting season opened. I saw many coveys of from four to eight birds, including the old hen who was shepherding them. Two weeks later, after the hunting season opened, I did not see a single covey in the open. In the seed timber on the tops of the ridges, I ran into singles and couples that took to the wing at fifty yards distance. The dusky had learned its seasonal lesson about the hunter.

When the dusky grouse season opens in the month of September, the birds are still feeding on blackberries, huckleberries, salal berries, and bracken of the burned-over logging country. They are one of many game species that benefit by the logging off of the timber. Breeding as they do on the ground, under the overhang of a fallen log, or in the cranies of stump roots, they get plenty of cover from the devastated-looking country, and lots of natural feed from it, too. At this September stage of their lives, the young are seldom full fledged, and are more apt to run than to fly. Depending on the month that brings spring blossoms to the country, the birds are either plentiful or scarce in the

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fall. A late, wet spring seems to hamper them, while a long, fairly dry summer is conducive to full plumaged birds when the season opens.

I have always found that the birds were much more abundant in country that had been left unburned, or in country where it had been burned but was now not fewer than five years from the ravages of fire. In both of these cases the birds thrive. The reason is that bracken ferns, with which they fill their crops in the evening before roosting, are abundant; also, blackberries and huckleberries are produced heavily in these localities, and the fallen and rotted logs breed thousands of insects.

Signs of dusky grouse are many, from the hen-like tracks in mud, the curled, purple-stained dung (common to grouse) on logs and stumps, to the russet pockets of fluffed out, powdered tree rot. Grouse, like barnyard chickens, love to pick out a sunny ridge or open spot where a tree has disintegrated into rich, brown, powdery punk. In this clean dust they will fluff their feathers, cuddle down, and kick their legs back and forth, sending the cleanser into their feathers. I have seen three of them, within as many feet, dusting and preening, standing up and shaking themselves and dusting again. The dusting spots are not noticeable until you know what they are, but once you learn to recognize them, they become the best sign of a used habitat. Grouse, like many other game species, are regular in their habits, and I remember in that connection an amusing incident concerning dusky grouse.

My wife asked me one morning what I was going to do in the afternoon. I told her I would stay in the garden until two o'clock, but that at three o'clock I had a date with a chicken. She laughed at me, and seemed to dismiss the matter. At 2:30 she saw me come into the house, choose a gun, and start out the door.

"I thought you had a date with a chicken at three o'clock," she smiled tantalizingly.

"I have," I replied, and refusing to answer her outburst about wanting me to drive her into town for shopping, I went on my way.

Twenty minutes later I picked two birds out of the covey, then returned to the house with them. My wife was as mad as a wet hen, saying that she had missed an appointment and that she didn't see why I had to pick three o'clock to go hunting grouse. There was no convincing her with words, much less with the argument that I would not have been able to find the same birds at five o'clock. The following afternoon, at three o'clock, I took another bird from the same covey, at the same spot, and brought it to her. She asked me, in a woman-like manner, how the birds knew it was three o'clock. The answer is, of course, that they didn't. Animals feed by light and darkness, digestion, and abundance of forage. If it takes a certain time after sunup for them to get water, fill their gizzards with gravel, feed on berries until their crops are full, and dust and laze until the food intake is digested, then repeat the program, they become timed by their natural processes. If a hunter finds that these natural processes coincide with his approach to a certain spot on one day, on the next day he is very likely to discover a coincidence of animal timing with the bunch of metal cogs he wears on his arm or in his pocket called a watch.

The moral here is that a hunter will find it pays to check his time when he scares up a non-roving animal. If there is no disturbance the first day, it is likely the animal will be there the following day at the same time. This rule is, of course, dependent upon the season of the year and assumes that weather conditions remain fairly constant, and food supply abundant.

There is a definite, if unrecognized, migration of grouse, much as there is of snow birds from the mountain tops to the valleys, but it is reversed in the case of the grouse. They come to the lower levels for early feed on the snowless ground in the spring. When the berry season has passed on the flats, the birds return to the mountains and follow the later berry and bud developments to the heights. Finally, late in the year, they seem to spend most of their time in the tall fir, hemlock, and pine trees. I have not shot a dusky grouse in the snow season of winter, but I should imagine the crops of the birds are well filled with conifer seeds and fall buds.

The flight of a dusky grouse, while not as zooming as that of the so-called willow, or ruffed grouse, requires a good shot. If in open country, the bird will rocket up to about fifteen feet, level off, and skim or voloplane for some fifty to three hundred yards, depending on the lay of the land. The best shot is at the break of the rise, which occurs about fifteen to twenty-five yards away, usually directly in front of the hunter. Where there are many hunters in the field, the shooting is, of course, much like pheasant shooting, with birds crossing from every direction. They spurt up, beat their wings fast for a moment, then set them and sail. If the area below them, at the end of the first coast with wings set, isn't to their liking, they will beat their wings for a short space, then coast again. I have never seen them flying on a level, even flight, and seldom do they ever rise to the tops of any but the short trees. They plummet into a bushy tree with a motion like that of a fat person easing himself into a chair after a short trot. On a sloping ridge, they usually hit the second or third conifer tree, high up. When they go out of that tree, they may go on to one or two more trees a short distance away, after that, and often after the first tree, they spurt for the open. From this point you will see them coast down a thousand feet before losing themselves in another ridge

Previous remarks concerning the indistinct markings of the grouse family were not meant to be derogatory to these grand birds. The finely contrived patterns in grouse plumage provide a camouflage of the most perfect type in their natural habitat. They can blend so successfully with twigs, decayed leaves, and wood that their general russet, buff, and black markings look like lights and shadows. The grouse relies on this camouflage, to the disgust and consternation of many hunters. Many times when I have been hunting all day, I have been reduced to a cold sweat by stumbling on a grouse which whirled up from my feet. The sudden thunder of their wings, almost in my face, usually produces so much confusion that I don't swing my gun as swiftly as I should. But, from the reliance by the bird upon the sudden spurt of wings comes the muscular development of the heavily meaty breast, which is grand eating. Only the



bulging muscles possessed by the grouse, moreover, could elevate so heavy a bird with poorly designed flying wings.

However, there are a few unmistakable giveaways. If the hunter is moving very slowly, the grouse will rustle leaves nervously and give a warning that sounds like "prrrrt prrrrt," which is a definite sign of a covey of several birds. Unlike quail, ducks, and snipe, the covey doesn't get up with one concerted effort. One bird will spurt off, then another, sometimes two together, but seldom three. I counted twenty as they got up from one patch of bracken not twenty-feet square. It was evening, with the sun red and angry, on a late fall day I took six grouse by choosing the easier shots, and at no time did I double. I walked into the bracken in order to scare up the balance of the birds, after reloading twice and picking up my first bird. This was in an area which had not been hunted for two or three years

The guns to be used for dusky grouse may range from .410 bore, to 12-gauge single, double, pump, or automatic, although I think the automatic gives a trifle too much advantage. The best shot-shells are from No. 5 to No. 7, something giving a quick wide pattern in an open cylinder or modified choke. The dusky grouse is the one game bird in parts of the United States and Canada that is open to shooting with a rifle, and the .22 caliber is often used for taking them. It is a controversial issue. The sportsmen who use a shotgun claim that a rifle gives too much advantage, because of the habit the birds have of perching right after flight, whereas riflemen say they can't hit a bird in flight with a rifle once in a thousand tries, but a good shotgun handler can down four out of five as they get up. The ethics of shooting a sitting bird was put down in a remark I heard from a logger-hunter's wife: "You guy's [not *me*] give me a laugh. You chase a poor little fox all over with a bunch of hound dogs and race horses, and call that *sporting*. You can afford a five-hundred-dollar shotgun and a hundred bucks worth of skeet ammunition, but my man is lucky to be able to buy a four-bit box of .22 shells. What're you tryin' to give us? Do you want the game of this country reserved for a bunch of lace-panted lords, as it is in the Old Country?"

Well, she had something there. With awe and disgust, I have lifted up the door of a visiting sportsman's car trunk, to find exactly forty-eight birds and two shot guns lying there. The men seemed to be shooters but the two women didn't look as if they had enough brains to use a pressing iron, let alone shoot a shotgun effectively. Yet they had licences in their names. This was two days after the opening of the dusky-grouse season, the limit being six birds *per person* for each day. I was acting in my capacity as an ex-officio game warden and provincial policeman. Most of the birds were unfledged, meaning that the "sportsmen" *had slaughtered whole coveys* with shotguns. A man with a rifle would likely have taken not more than half a covey before the birds became sufficiently alarmed to take wing. The answer I give is my own principle, and I do not insist that it is right. I don't think a hunter should take more than two birds from any one covey, and I hold to that rule unless the covey is a later gathering of birds exceeding fifteen to twenty fully fledged grouse.

When the birds are found in the timber, it is usually after the first few frosts. Although I have seen small coveys on the ridges, I don't remember any larger than six birds and at other times they are found as single or paired birds. Hunting singles takes more work, and is, therefore, more enjoyable. I have found that they keep almost the same locality that deer do during the day, about a quarter of the way down the ridges, in the open, mossy, or short-growth spaces where sunning is close to short hedges. Usually they will be found just where the long branches of a tree fan out over the brow of a rock to form a small, dry coating of needles on the even surface. When you are coming out of parkland or forest onto such a ridge, it is a good idea to stop and listen for the nervous motions or warning *prrrrt prrrrt* of the bird.

## 16 : *Band-Tail Pigeons*



WHEN YOU are trying to sneak up on a flock of band-tailed pigeons, hoping against hope to get within one hundred yards of them, you would little think that in the year 1912 one hunter could ship more than two thousand birds to market. The wonder is that he could ship twenty a year, for the band-tail, white-collar, or wild pigeon, as he is variously called, was once almost as thick in the West as the pigeon who bore the brunt of one of our most ignominious blunders, the passenger pigeon. Hunters in Texas, Colorado, North Dakota, New Mexico, and all of the Pacific Coast states, and into British Columbia, Canada, may know this bird and have shot it, for it wanders widely.

Brought up in the northwestern part of our continent, I find that my first and fondest memory of fall hunting centers in the band-tail, and I still place it first in line for sheer difficulty of hunting, and wariness, among game birds, and first for sheer edibility. The idea that it is a tough table bird is the biggest fallacy of which I know. Having heard many hunters say, "Oh, heck, I wouldn't bother to go after that bird. It's too tough for anything but stewing," I have looked owlish and said nothing. The longer these hunters mislead themselves, the better. The flocks will increase and thus there will be more for those who really know the bird. As a matter of fact, stuffed and roasted, a band-tailed pigeon has the tenderness of a pheasant, the thick breast of a grouse, and the fat of a grain-fed mallard, the meat

of which it closely resembles. The story has it (but don't quote me) that "No man can eat a whole one each day for a month, because they are too rich for the system." I think a man would kill himself striving to shoot one a day for a whole month. Maybe there lies the truth in the old saying.

A bird of the forest and high timber, the band-tail has grown more wary by the year, and with the banning of rifles, the chances of taking the bird regularly are slim. However, like the wild duck, the band-tail is migratory and goes to Mexico and as far south as Guatemala for the winter season. In these countries it has a good many hunters after it, hunters who are not too well disciplined by law or nature. If it dies out, as did its cousin, the passenger pigeon, it is my humble opinion that its demise will come about because of practices *south of the U S border*. This is an eventuality which no one wishes even to think about.

Arriving in the Pacific Northwest (Oregon, Washington, British Columbia) in the spring, *Columba fasciata fasciata* Say, as it is known technically, usually singles out a patch of deciduous growth close to a stream and nests in the trees. At this time of the year the band-tail is seldom seen, except in pairs going about the duties of parenthood in much the same manner as the pigeons in the cornices of the public buildings, and with just as much cooing and just as little guile. I was able to obtain excellent photographs of these antics, much to my own surprise, as I had first made the acquaintance of the bird as it was in the fall of the year, a wild, scary, darting, comet-flying bit of blue-gray hunting material, uncommonly difficult to bring down. I must confess I don't know what these birds eat, but their presence in deciduous growth points to buds and berries of such trees as the alder and the trillium. There is, in fact, a very small flower named the pigeon berry, which is almost an exact duplicate of the dogwood tree in miniature, and it is in the dogwood patches during hunting season that the birds gorge their crops.

During the late summer the birds seem to become more gregarious, and tend to flock in the early morning in the tall dead snags. I have counted over one hundred of them in one

snag towards the end of the hunting season, but the usual group doesn't run more than ten to twenty birds. At this time they have become very alert to any movement in the bushes below them, and will wing off at the first sight of man, even if he is as much as a quarter of a mile away. For the past twenty years that I have been watching the flocks and studying them, I have only seen two really tremendous concentrations. One that I witnessed seven years ago blacked out three or four acres of sky. How many birds were in that bunch, I perhaps shouldn't venture a guess, but I'd say many thousands. This is the time of danger for band-tails. In these large bands, they wing their way south, stopping at often frequented places for food and water. It was during such migrations that partially exhausted birds were at one time slaughtered by the thousands in Oregon. At the risk of being boring on this splendid species, I might point out to the hunter that these thousands of migrating birds represent the *whole population left in the world*. When they arrive in British Columbia in the spring, they spread out like grains of fine sand and nest over thousands of square miles of territory. If a large flock is killed off, it means that whole areas of the natural nesting habitat are cleaned out, inasmuch as the birds return each year to the same locality.

Perhaps I have taken away the pleasure of hunting them, but if you take *no more than half a dozen a year*, you won't do too much harm. As they go south, they flock into pea or bean fields, and if they are roosting on ridges close to these fields, they can be found in the evening, from four o'clock to about seven, down among the peas or beans. The same hours hold good for the pigeons that inhabit the mountains and rocky fiords of the coast, but at these hours they are usually in the dogwood trees of the valleys and dales.

Like the black brant, the band-tail pigeon seems to be a Pacific Coast breeder, staying close to the shore waterways and seldom straying more than one hundred miles into the interior during nesting season. There is a well-known fallacy about band-tail pigeons, that they will not fly over water. It is, of course, not true.

Several years back, Jack Blower, a widely known hunter, since deceased, proved this to me. He asked me if I'd been out for any pigeon shooting that season, but because there was a forest-fire closure on the forests that year I thought he was kidding me. For the benefit of those who may not know what this means, I might explain that, when a summer season has been very hot and the humidity is low, the public is sometimes kept out of the forests of many western states and Canadian provinces, to reduce the possibility of forest fires. Such a measure will often be adopted early in August and remain in effect until late in September or October. Game hunters are necessarily kept from their pastimes. When Jack asked me if I had been out, I said politely, "Are you kidding?" and treated him to a cold stare.

"Heck, Mike," he replied, "we got a basketful down the canal [Alberni Canal] the other day. Want to go out tomorrow?"

"And get pinched?" I snorted. "Not much. You've got no business in the timber when the other guys are observing the ban."

"We shoot them from a boat," he informed me with a degree of tolerance.

"Shoot them from a boat!" I snorted. "Hell, pigeons won't fly over water!"

"Like to bet fifty bucks on that one?" he challenged.

Jack had been a camp hunter at one time, that is a paid hunter who supplied the logging camps of the coast with venison, so I knew better than bet with him.

The following week end, Jack, his son, our mutual friend George Young, mixed blood Chinese-Indian, and I went down the Alberni Canal in three boats, a small inboard dingy pulling a dugout canoe and another rowboat. The coast line in the North is pretty well all the same, large granite or batholithic crags and ridges running sheer into the salt water, sparsely timbered near the rock shore line, heavily timbered farther back, split occasionally by small valleys, with mountain creeks filling in small deltas. It was to such a small delta, at the mouth of China Creek that we sailed. On either side of the delta was a craggy headland of moss-covered rock, with a few dead-topped fir trees.

Shortly before we reached the first headland, Jack and I got into the dingy, while his son and George circled out to sea in order to come into the bluffs on the other side of the estuary. As we approached the first rocky promontory, sure enough, a flock of band-tail pigeons were sunning themselves on the gray dead branches of a high fir. Jack motioned to them.

"I can't see much chance of getting close to them, Jack," I said woefully.

"We will," he informed me. "They don't seem to scare at the approach of a rowboat. And if we wait until George and Jim get close to that point, we'll get some good shooting, by the look of things."

When our boat drew close to the birds, we quit rowing, letting the tide drift us in. George and Jim were doing the same thing about five hundred yards away. Our boat drifted almost under the overhanging fir snags, and I put up my gun.

"Okay!" said Jack, who rose up in the boat.

The birds came out of the snags like fluttering paper, but about a hundred times as fast. Jack's gun blasted twice, and down came three birds. I didn't get in a shot.

"Sorry, Jack," I apologized. "I didn't expect them to come out over us. I guess that's all for a while, eh?"

"Not on your life," he said convincingly, fishing a fluffy carcass from the salt chuck. "When George and Jim shoot, they'll come back."

Three shots punctuated the remark, and I saw a couple of white specks down by the other boat. Birds started coming our way again. They were flying swiftly across the big bay to alight in the snags above us. As they came in, we shot again and again. I took only two, but all I've got to say is that shooting ducks from a punt is sissy stuff compared to cross-shooting pigeons from a rowboat. A duck flies fast, but in a line. A pigeon flies faster, and in anything but a line. They can sideslip a bunch of shot like a greased platter out of wet hands. The one thing they allow in the hunter's favor is the tendency to circle from two familiar points several times, trying to alight in trees to which they have become accustomed.

At the end of a big lake I once had some similar shooting over water. But most of my hunting of band-tails has been in the timber, usually it is broken by big mossy ridges, or on the tops of mountain slopes denuded of timber. This latter terrain offers sport that I think is tops. In the first place, you have to locate a spot where band-tails can be found, but there are thousands of miles of coast and lake shore upon which they are not found. This complicates things. Few people in the districts even recognize them, and few know where they nest or sun themselves. If you are going after them, there are two sure ways to locate them from a long distance away. One is the bird itself, sitting at sundown or dawn in a tall, dead-topped fir tree; the other way is to look for an eagle's nest in a dead snag near a fair amount of dogwood growth and a stream.

Of the eagle's nest and the incidence of band-tailed pigeons in the area, I have my own opinions, but as I must again repeat, I am not an authority. Here is explanation, for what it is worth. Eagles are primarily fish eaters, and it is natural for them to nest on a promontory near a stream, because of the runs of fish. The eagle is a slow-flying predator, not quick enough for the pigeons, and I have yet to see a hawk stay in the same territory with an eagle for long. Pigeons by the band will be seen roosting in trees adjacent to a sitting eagle, exhibiting no sign of fear of the big bird. My observations indicate that, in fact, they don't fear the eagle, that they know hawks will stay away when the eagle is around (a fact of which they take advantage); also that they like the same type of country frequented by the eagle, because it produces the food they like, streams usually being conducive to the deciduous growth from which they obtain their food. So, if you see an eagle's nest in that type of country, take a close look to see if the high snags hold a lot of gray lumps or nobbs. Those nobbs may be pigeons.

Another queer thing about pigeons sitting thus in snags is that they might appear to be quite red breasted. But when you bring them down you will find they are a rather lovely powder-blue gray. My explanation is that the light at dawn and sunset is reddish, while the breasts of the band-tails are slightly iri-



descent, and therefore catch the reddish rays of the sun and imprison the color. I feel not a little foolish in admitting this, but even though my eyes are supposed to be unusually keen for game, I have shot a single robin winging away from a very high snag, after I had made a careful stalk, because I *thought* he was a band-tail. Perspective and over-anxiety I guess, but a robin puffed up in repose looks about the same size as an alert pigeon with its breast feathers pressed down for quick flight.

Which brings to mind the case of a friend of mine who, like myself, loves his pigeon shooting as much as any. Jack and I were hunting in a forest near our home made up of second-growth timber, very dense. The only shots to be had at pigeons were as they passed an open patch of sky about six to twenty feet square. The pigeons had been scooting by like Halloween rockets all day, and we had only two birds apiece and a full bag of alibis. We spotted at least one hundred by actual count, sitting in a very high snag about a quarter of a mile away. We decided to try a stalk on them, with the idea that we would come at the tree from the north side, count three, yell loud enough to put the birds in flight, and fire both shots in our pump guns. It took us a full half-hour of belly crawling, climbing, and silent sneaking to get within twenty feet of the 150-foot, dead-topped snag. I looked at Jack. His eyes were like my own. We just couldn't believe it. One hundred band-tails sunning themselves above us, like red baubles on an over-decked Christmas tree. M M M M M m m m. Pigeon pie! Nice roasted or fried pigeon breasts! We ought to get *at least* six.

"One," I hissed, "two, THREE! S C R A M !"

Click!

My hammer dropped on a spent shell. Jack got a funny look on his face as the birds hurtled yards away from their high perch, going with the speed of homing pigeons. He looked down at his gun, then pushed the safety off, forgetting his finger was on the trigger. The resultant blast added only to our ignominy and the speed of the already out-of-range birds. A shower of dead branches from his shot and my hasty reload was our sole reward.

"Gawdamwell serves us right for ground sluicing," Jack

scowled sheepishly, while I just hung my head in shame. It was the best band-tail pigeon stalk I had ever made, though. We got to within fifty yards of one hundred birds, something neither of us ever did before, or have done since.

Don't be surprised if you have to climb a mountain two thousand or three thousand feet high to take a band-tail, for these birds hang to the edges of timber and seem particularly fond of the seed timber left after a heavy logging cut has been made. Has somebody asked about the gun to use after you've climbed three thousand feet? I'd say that a light double-barrel with a wide pattern is the best. A band-tail, once hit, is killed very easily, one number seven shot, almost anywhere, being plenty of lead. If the hunter likes to stalk them for shots going away from a tree, a full-choke barrel in a 12-gauge, with a long-range shell and far-carrying shot, from 4 to 2, are best. And for the man who doesn't like plucking his fowl, pigeons are a breeze. The feathers will almost brush off them.

A further good sign that pigeons are around is the thick residue of infertile dogwood seeds of an orange hue around the bases of dogwood trees. The birds, for some reason, seem to pick from one to four or five trees in a glade, and clean the trees of all seeds. You can hear the flutter of wings one hundred yards away, but you will have to sneak up like a cat on cotton batting to get near them. If you hear a *clickety-clack-clack* sound of wings, turn your eyes to the open blue above you. Pigeons will be going by. That sound is their warning, and fifty pigeons will spook as one when it is given. They seem to post sentinels on the tops of second-growth fir and hemlock trees, and if you see one bending the top over and dancing on the branch like a star too heavy for a Christmas-tree top, you can figure it has seen you. You might as well raise your gun and shoot, *if* you can get it up in time. You won't get any closer to the main band. There will be a clicking of wings, a heavy fluttering near you, and that will be all.

Perhaps the only fault in their armor is what I pointed out earlier. They usually have a flyway of sorts established. If scared from one bunch of dead top snags, they will fly to another, up

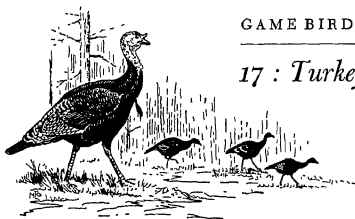
to a quarter of a mile away. If another hunter goes to that spot, they will fly back to the original one. They will repeat this performance about three times, and then head for the thick branches of the green fir and hemlock trees. I had one band-tail light six feet above my head, in thick brush, when I was sneaking up on a willow grouse in very thick timber. There had been a lot of shooting that morning, and just before the bird lit above me, I had heard a shot *about half a mile away*. That pigeon lit close to the trunk of a very bushy fir tree, in extremely dense second growth, deep in the timber, and every feather was pressed close and tight to its body, its head cocked and jerking warily. This experience showed me the extreme effort to which they will go in order to hide. Now I never bother to try to find a flock after a series of shots has been fired.

The actual shooting of band-tails when they are in flight is, to me, just as great an achievement as shooting running deer or downing a grizzly. They can wheel on a dime, scoot like a rocket, and fly the craziest escape patterns you can think of. Add that to the tough country they usually inhabit during hunting season, and you have a very, very interesting game bird.

## GAME BIRDS

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### 17 : *Turkeys*



THE SUDDEN, nerve-shattering sound of a turkey's gobble on otherwise silent air has more than once terminated the short-lived retirement of a man with cardiac disease. But I, for one, think the soul of the hunter was probably never nearer to heaven than at the sound, whether his spiritual self was going aloft or had the chance to remain on earth. The call of the largest natural game bird in North America is only a prelude to his magnificent strut as this cock of the walk calls his hens around him. When a big tom moves alertly out of the shade of the underbrush in answer to a call, you get an illusion of size that is not altogether true, particularly if he suddenly ruffles his feathers and fans his tail before giving his majestic summons to the scattered flock. Actually, a wild-turkey tom reaches a length of four feet and a weight of better than thirty pounds. I don't know whether turkeys attained these proportions before the Spaniards introduced them from Mexico to the well-fed domesticity of Europe some four hundred years ago, permitting later settlers to bring them back to be propagated as stocked game birds. It is a subject about which old turkey hunters don't seem to agree, but there is reason to believe that, where "natural" stock is predominant, the "wild turkey" certainly is smaller and more able to take care of itself than is the case with mixed bloods or pure strains of captive birds.

Of later years the turkey has been identified as the only

true pheasant of North America, and is categorized by naturalists as the order *Gallinae*, suborder *Phasiani*, family *Meleagridae*, there being five different forms recognized by ornithologists: Merriam's turkey, Florida turkey, Rio Grande turkey, American wild turkey, and Yucatan ocellated turkey. Turkeys formerly ranged from southern Ontario, Maine, and South Dakota in the North, thence to eastern Texas, thence south through Florida to Mexico and Central America. Of late years the efforts of game departments have brought them to many additional areas, but not with too much success. The main reason for partial failure seems to be the ease with which the bird becomes semidomesticated; but lending further complication is the fact that turkeys need a specialized type of natural food, notably acorns, as well as good cover and water.

However, where the birds are "wild" stock, they are hardy and difficult to hunt. It seems to me that the stalk of a turkey is a cross between a still hunt for whitetail deer and a goose hunt without decoys. You call 'em and you stalk 'em, both!

For many years I had wanted to hunt turkeys, but since they are not natural inhabitants of the Pacific Northwest, I had to wait until we arrived in Mexico. But I saw my first wild gobblers in mid-Texas while we were driving on a highway north of San Antonio. My wife happened to look out the window of the car, and asked very naturally, "Isn't that a turkey?"

I felt as if she had jabbed me with a hatpin. Slamming on the brakes, I grabbed my camera. There was a big old tom turkey just back in an open space between the scrub oaks, and he was busy raising ructions with two hens. I sneaked out of the car, which I had had the presence of mind to drive a bit farther down the road, and slunk into the green growth.

There was no doubt Old Tom had been hunted before, even though we were in the wild country that only Texas has in abundance. The big bird was nowhere in evidence, but I saw the two hens running off into the thickness of the undergrowth. I waited for a call from the Old Tom. It came suddenly on the deep silence not one hundred yards from me, with that "*E-E-E-E-Turk*" sound that no other bird simulates. My scalp fairly

prickled. There was an answering *turk-turk*, and I saw one of the hens break cover heading in the direction of the old polygamist.

A few minutes of careful stalking gave me sight of the birds rustling for the depths of an oak thicket about 150 yards away. Respect for the wild turkey and all I had read assumed full bloom in my consciousness. Had the stalk I had just completed been after a buck or a pheasant cock, I'd have expected to be a lot closer.

There are, however, excellent means of hunting turkey successfully, for the turkey's rather consistent behavior pattern can be put to use by the sportsman. It is said that turkeys will range in flocks over an area of fifteen miles. I don't know about that, but I did notice down in the state of Tamaulipas in Mexico that, once broken up, a flock doesn't seem to be satisfied until it re-assembles. And often it will gather in the same place from which it was recently put to flight.

Sr. Pepi Juárez, who had heard of my desire to go hunting, came to our auto court one day and very politely introduced himself to our children. Some time later he asked me if I'd like to go hunting on his *amigo's hacienda* for the "*coco punzo*." Frankly, I didn't know what a "*coco punzo*" was, but I said yes anyway. The only things I neglect my family for are penny-ante poker games, fishin', and huntin'. He said *hunt* something. I said *sure!* I asked my wife quietly in English what a "*coco punzo*" was. She said it was a wild turkey. Huh! Wild turkey! Why the heck didn't the man say *wild turkey!* Señor Juárez had hardly time to grab up his sombrero before I whipped him out into the car on the way to his *amigo's hacienda*.

At the estate of Señor Juárez's friend, I was glad to see that a small stream ran down from a fissure in the mountains to wind lazily through the several hundreds of acres. There were many good thickets of trees and large areas of low brush land beyond the cultivated fields. The old Don wasn't in that afternoon, but Juárez said he would arrange that evening with Sr. Velasco y Montez that I might be able to shoot the next morning, or sometime soon anyway.

It was two days later when he came back with profuse apologies, *El Patrón*, Don Velasco y Montez, had been visiting in Mexico D.F., but he would be glad to have the *Canadiense*, the turkey hunter, come to hunt his lands. We visited him that evening in his beautiful tiled mansion.

Was I a turkey hunter? A hunter of fame? No. I just wanted to hunt wild turkeys. Oh. He had thought I was a turkey hunter of special quality. Did I know a domestic turkey from a wild turkey? I thought so. I wondered what he was getting at. It came out under the thoughtful guidance of Señor Juárez. The Don had been plagued by complaints from his peon share croppers that the wild turkeys were stealing their hens. He, too, had lost several of his prize domestic hens to a wild tom turkey that lured them from his property into the woods. He would be pleased if I would shoot the *solterón* who was responsible. Who, me? Shoot an old "*soltero*," the wisest of game birds! And for my first wild turkey? Oh, sure!

Pepi Juárez was ready with a *chico* (young boy) to follow us and carry the birds when I arrived at five in the morning. Moreover, he had a .22 rifle and a 10-gauge shotgun of the vintage 1860, a big side-hammer gun. He offered me the latter, saying it was his most prized possession. I suggested it was too "*preciosa*" for me to handle, that I'd like the .22 rifle. He agreed reluctantly, but I think he was as afraid of the blunderbuss as I was.

We arrived at the *hacienda*, and two peons joined us as naturally as if it had all been arranged, which it probably was. Mexicans are as casual as a new dawn. They, it seemed, knew the neck of the woods where the turkey flock was likely to be. We drove along a dirt road for almost a mile, and I noticed we were approaching the arroyo from which the stream left the mountains. Also, that there were taller trees in the area which would make good turkey roostings.

The five of us climbed from the car into the blue of early morning light, and the two peons forged off into the ravine. That annoyed me. I like to hunt on my own. They would scare the birds out of the roosts and break the flock up before I got a

chance to get close to the yelps which were emanating from sleepy birds already. I said so to Señor Juárez.

He looked at me sadly. Did I not know that the flock must be broken up first, then called back one at a time? I apologized that I'd forgotten. Suddenly I thought of my quest. Did I know a wild turkey from a barnyard turkey, I asked myself. No! I did not! What if I shot some of the prized tame turkeys belonging to the old Don? The birds that I had seen tied by the leg in almost every Mexican pueblo in the country looked very much like wild turkeys to me. Mexicans usually stake out their barnyard fowls like cattle, with a piece of string tied about the leg. These birds were usually smaller than the domestic turkeys of the United States and Canada; to me, they were indiscernible from the wild bird, except when they happened to be mottled with white feathers.

Señor Juárez broke into my reverie.

"You know not to shoot the hens?" he asked.

I replied that I did. That I knew it must be against the law. He shook his head. No. It was not against the law. It was against *El Patrón's*, Don Velasco y Montez's, wishes that I shoot his prize hens. Only the big wild gobbler who stole the hens, and any smaller wild toms that I should see. My feet seemed cold despite the warmth of the subtropical morning.

We had been moving slowly into the skirt of trees along the creek. Suddenly there was a commotion of yelling peons and the *gibble gabble* of excited turkeys, the heavy swish of wild wings, and the sound of big bodies hitting the brush around us. Señor Juárez grinned in the returning light and looked significantly at me. The peons came back grinning, spoke politely to Señor Juárez, and faded back down the trail with grinning bows to me. Señor Juárez reached under his serape and produced the short white wing bone of a turkey. I thought he was carrying it for good luck until he put it to his mouth and made the darndest sound. For a moment I thought a tom turkey had mistakenly run between our legs. It proved to be Señor Juárez's turkey caller. He instructed me to follow him among the trees, and on our arrival there he motioned to me to sit down. I did so,



after sweeping aside the dry leaves to clear out any chance *alecranes* (scorpions) that might be around. Señor Juárez moved silently off into the bush, and a few moments later I heard him calling. At least I judged it was he. I sat and waited.

About half an hour later, when I was just starting to doze, I heard a rustle of dried leaves and brush to my left, away from the calling of Señor Juárez. I pointed my rifle at the bushes and was surprised to see the grinning face of Pancho, our *chico* game carrier. He smiled happily and lay still. Almost directly afterwards I heard the cautious answers from different parts of the now daylight thickets. Then it happened!

A big tom, bronzed of back, red of face, with enormous proportions beyond the shoulders, strutted out of the edge of a green bush. He looked as large as any barnyard turkey I had ever seen, and if anything sleeker. Since he was only thirty yards off, I felt I couldn't miss if I could control the shaking of my hands. I moved quietly, still behind the bush, lined up the sights on his head, and squeezed the trigger. The big bird went down with the darndest scuffling of feathers and jumping and rolling I had ever witnessed up to that time. Pancho hit him in a football tackle like a young cheetah. I breathed deeply. Hell, there wasn't anything to wild turkey hunting!

Señor Juárez came quietly from the woods, looked carefully at the big bird, and shook his head solemnly. He turned to me and shrugged. His face was serious, and he had to force a smile. I was surprised. Hadn't I just killed the old hen-stealer? He shook his head again.

"This was not the hen-stealer," he said, with a deep note of futility in his tone. I didn't like the sound of that "was" in the past tense, and wondered about it. It was a *tom*, wasn't it? How was I to know if it was the "*soltero*"? He shrugged his shoulders with apathetic understanding. Of course, I couldn't be sure. The light was bad.

He took me farther into the bush, cautioned me to be quiet, and walked a short distance away. Shortly he began to call and get answers. About an hour later I had seen at least six hen turkeys and had drawn a head on each one, but I saw no gobbling

toms. I got up quietly and stalked away from the calling. Deer, I knew, never came directly to investigate a curious sound. They always circled. If I went out beyond that circle, then watched an open spot which the turkeys would have to cross to reach the call, I might get another bird.

The sun was full up now, but I put up two very big hens, which I knew from their size had once been domestic birds. On the ridge of the arroyo, I found a circle of thorn bush that opened out onto clear ground that lay between Señor Juárez and me. I sat down to await developments. They happened quickly. A good-sized tom turkey strutted out into the open, followed almost immediately by two hens. So, here was the *soltero*! And the hens were wild ones. There was something different about the shape of the birds. Longer, sleeker in the way they carried their feathers, alert and wary of movement, there was nothing of domestication in them. The tom went behind a bush as I eased my rifle up and waited. At sixty yards I had to use the body shot. As his head came past the shielding bush I squeezed the trigger. He walked right into the bullet at the base of his wing bone. He flopped around and died before I got to him.

Señor Juárez and Pancho were there before I got down from the ridge. Señor Juárez was grinning. He patted me on the shoulder. Good! *Bueno*! This was one of the wild birds! But, too bad it was not *the big tom*. I was disappointed because of Don Velasco y Montez but happy over my two big toms. I asked Señor Juárez to show me how to work the caller. My results were absolutely astounding. I got answering calls from yellow warblers, red-eyed vireos, Mexican magpies, and from someone's stray parrot. Juárez laughed, placed the turkey bone to his lips, and distilled out the sound of a wild turkey as sweetly as a love call. He tried to show me again. I tried, but all I got was red in the face from blowing, and embarrassment from my companion. He took the call and began making sounds softly.

We had been sitting close to the downed bird, quite still. I heard a rustle above us on the ridge. I thought I saw the red face of a tom between the leaves, and eased around. Neither Pancho nor Señor Juárez seemed to sense my movement. Sud-

denly against the sunburnt earth of the ridge, under some bushes, I saw the slow, stealthy leg movement of a turkey. I eased my gun up. Señor Juárez turned suddenly, and the bird jumped ahead with a quick, furtive movement almost one hundred yards away. It looked like a stringy old tom. I hit him on the jump and he floundered among the bushes. Pancho brought him proudly from the ridge. He was a big bird, stringily built, with no fat on him, sleek feathered, but not too prepossessing in appearance. His head looked a bit battered, and his neck was broken where it joined the body, the point at which I'd fired a little too fast and almost missed.

"Not too good a Tom," I said in broken Spanish. "A bit flea-bitten and old."

Señor Juárez patted me on the shoulder and told me I was too bashful, considering the shot. Now we would go! We could perhaps shoot turkeys another time. I agreed. It was wonderful sport!

I picked up my first bird, the really big gobbler, despite Señor Juárez's protests, and hung it over my shoulder. I judged it to weigh at least thirty-five pounds. To me, a monarch of a big wild bird! Pancho picked up the stringy old specimen and the young tom, slung them proudly on his back, and followed us back to the car. Señor Juárez seemed glum, and I thought, "What the heck! I've killed three good-sized wild turkeys. What did he expect?" I couldn't be sure of any old tom's being the one they wanted. Even at that, the big bird was just as much a menace as the *soltero*, and so was the young tom. Sooner or later, they would challenge the wise old wild one and become domestic hen-turkey stealers.

We drove into the compound of the *hacienda*, with me feeling like a new man. Old Don Velasco y Montez came politely out to the car. Proudly I pulled out the big bird to show him. His face did the quickest contortion from benign politeness to red rage that I've ever seen in a human. He almost hopped about with anger. I felt a sudden misgiving.

"This—*this!*" he said, pointing at the wonderful big tom. "This is my most prized male!"

I felt a sinking feeling in my groin.

"But," I apologized helplessly, "how was I to know?"

He pointed at a leg. I stared in amazement. There was a series of yellow bands on the leg. I can't understand how I had failed to see them before. I got slowly into the car with a warning look at Señor Juárez, who was looking sheepish and trying to speak above the tirade the old man was leveling at him. Señor Juárez wasn't getting a word in. I turned the ignition on for a quick getaway. Pancho climbed out of the car with the other two birds. He pointed to the head of the stringy old bird. The old man came over and examined it carefully. If he said *that one*, too, was one of his prized birds, I'd call him a liar!

Suddenly the old *patrón's* face was wreathed in smiles. He rushed over to me and gave me the *abrazo*, a none too gentle but happy bear hug.

... "*Madre mía!* You are a good hunter!" he exploded. "This is the devil who steals the tame birds. See!"

I looked at the bird. There were scars on his head and a bare patch just behind the shoulder, where the feathers were sparse from an old and bad wound. It was where Don Velasco y Montez had himself shot the bird with a .30-30 Winchester rifle. He had gone to pick him up, only to have the old devil fly away, he assured me. Oh, what a mighty turkey hunter I was! Would I have a *ron potrero*, or *Cuba libre* to celebrate the victory? Frankly, I would!

And that is how I became the *Turkey Hunter Más Grande of the Estado de Tamaulipas*.

For me to advise a hunter how to hunt turkeys is a bit of a laugh, but here are a few of the tricks I learned. Turkey flocks don't like to be broken up. When they are, they will almost invariably come to a call. There are calls made of turkey wing bones, but usually only an old hand can master them. Some hunters call the turkey by using their own vocal chords. If you have the range of a turkey in your larynx, you can master this method before you can the wing bone. The other calls can be made with a piece of whetstone and a chunk of cedar, or they can be bought and practiced upon at home—if your wife is long

suffering. Most of the turkey "boxes" apply the same method, a cedar tongue scraped against a piece of slate, whetstone, or some such hard material. The general idea is to draw the wooden tongue across the stone quickly, to get the yelp, moving it more slowly to produce the *E-E-E-E-E*, or screech, which precedes the yelp. A little dry chalk rubbed on the slate seems to make it work better.

When you get what you think is a satisfactory call, try it where you know there are wild turkeys. If you get an answer, use it sparingly, waiting for the answering bird to come to you. A good idea is to sit close to a bush, or in it, or against a log or stump, with a fairly open space in front of you, preferably in the direction from which the answer comes.

If you don't like the call method, you might be lucky enough to find a regular turkey roost. Like all of the pheasant family, turkeys roost in trees near water and gravel, and will often use the same roost for quite a time if it is near good feed. Their big droppings under the trees are usually accompanied by a barnyard smell that is unmistakable to an ordinary nose. If they haven't been disturbed for some time, a watch just at sundown will occasionally be rewarded when the big birds drift into the area and roost, singly or in pairs, usually spread out over a few hundred yards, not much more. If you don't get a tom in the evening, you likely will hear the heavy flutter of the turkeys' wings, and then be able to place the trees in which they have roosted.

Early in the morning, while the light is still blue, they begin to drop out, almost always in the same pattern. They give a jump that sets the branch whistling, then coast, wings set, for some distance to an open spot. They will begin to call each other until the flock is gathered. At such times they can be called fairly easily, or shot when they hit the ground, or during flight.

Turkeys are not often shot at close range, due to their distinct wariness of mankind. However, a rifle on a flying bird requires expert handling, and sometimes they do get up when you least expect them. If they are close enough for a shotgun, the No. 4 kind and heavier are the best shot-shells. The bones

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are big and therefore do not break easily; and breaking is often necessary for a clean kill on a big bird. The shotgun is effective enough, but needs an effective still-hunter to make it count. Among the rifles used, the .22 caliber is most popular in some localities, but somewhat larger calibers, notably the .25-20 using full jacketed bullets, are better. With a rifle, a fair shot can kill a bird as far off as he can identify it. Some men feel a turkey isn't a fair kill unless hit in the head. For them, a body-shooting hunter goes down as a rank amateur. There is no doubt that a man who can always hit a turkey in the head at the distances turkeys usually stay from the hunter, is an expert shot.

Turkey hunting isn't big-game hunting, but it is so close to it that a hunter will savor the thrill of downing a big tom long after his achievements with whitetails have become dim memories. Turkeys are not quite that rare, but turkey kills are just that rare nowadays.

18 : *Ruffed Grouse*



ANYONE WHO HAS SEEN twenty or more ruffed grouse arch their wings, one after the other, and spurt out of a single cover has seen such a sight as Croesus must have seen with all his gold piled up. I saw twenty-three ruffed grouse get up from one crabapple thicket not twenty feet long. My companion and I stood astounded, watching bird after bird rocket out of those bushes, level off at about fifteen feet altitude, and streak into the pine forest about fifty yards away. It was in the Watch Lake District in the Caribou. It made me think of how the hunting in North America must have been before the arrival of white men.

The ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*), probably the most sporting of the grouse family to shoot, has been for many years in many localities closed to shooting, due to its near-extinction, but it is, I believe, coming back. In areas that I have hunted, far in the wilderness and hard to reach under several days, I have counted as many as twenty-seven ruffed grouse that got up from a pocket of dry ground under a snow-clad pine.

For hunting the ruffed grouse, the most logical place is near water. The spot can be near a lake with crabapple and salal brush growing thick on its sides, in fact, the same type of growth that is to be found near the home of the grouse on the seacoast, and the ruffed grouse is partial to willow and alder thickets and river and stream mouths. I have also shot single birds on the tops of mountains, sometimes as one was feeding or resting with the blue grouse on the open ridges.

The ruffed grouse feeds on many fruits of wild trees and bushes, such as the crabapple, dogwood berries, blackberries, huckleberries, and sometimes the salal berry, but, frankly, I have seen few crops that contained the latter berry. In the spring the grouse is supposed to feed on willow and alder buds, which are the natural foods derived from its surroundings. Since the birds are out of season in the spring, however, this information can be of little interest to the sportsman, but it does give a clue to where to find the birds all year round.

The ruffed grouse in the hunting season is usually found singly, seldom in pairs or coveys, perhaps because of an earlier nesting season than is characteristic of the blue grouse, and the birds have by fall matured and broken from parental care. It may also be that fewer birds from each covey reach maturity because of the greater number of predators that inhabit the natural habitat of the species.

The birds weigh up to three pounds, although rarely ever that much, but the meat from their plump breasts is sometimes three quarters of an inch in thickness. Roasted with stuffing, it is at its best, with the possible exception of the dish cooked out in the bush in a Dutch oven. We used to have a claybank in Cypress Creek when I was a boy, and none of us will ever forget the ruffed grouse we covered with wet clay and placed in a hot fir wood fire. This casserole, broken open about an hour later, pulled the feathers off the bird and revealed a lovely white, aromatic meat, the like of which could have honored the gods.

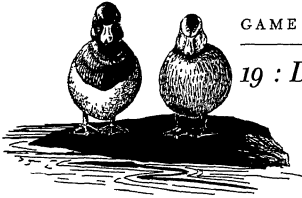
A shotgun or a .22 rifle are equal for camp hunting the ruffed grouse, as it will sit tight until you are right upon it, but it is very hard to see because of its natural camouflage coloring. If you have good eyes the .22 is fine, but not particularly sporting. If your eyes are not too keen, you won't see the ruffed grouse until it spurts up from almost between your knees, with a roar of wings that almost scares the pants off you. You'll need a shotgun to hit it, and you'll have to be a good shot, for it dives between the trees like a marble in a pinball game. If you get it in the open, it will lift straight up to somewhere between ten and twenty feet, level out, swing right or left (there's no curved pattern



I know of) around the first obstacle, and light in a low tree Not very often will it hit the ground again. Quiet stalking and good eyes will take you to it for another shot.

My preference in shot-shells is for No. 6 and No. 7, because they have a wide, fairly concentrated pattern and quite sufficient weight to penetrate the delicate feathers and flesh of the ruffed grouse. Any shotgun from 20- to 12-gauge is good, but since the shooting is quick, the lighter the gun, the easier handled. I'm strong for a double gun on this species, and for improved cylinder and modified barrels in the same.

When you get your chance at grouse, just a little advice: they, like the valley quail, are not abundant, so don't shoot too many of them. They do not breed freely and they have never been raised successfully in numbers necessary to restock them. Anyway, one ruffed grouse is enough for two people. After all we don't eat a whole box of mushrooms at a sitting. That's why they remain savory. So it is with the drummer, whose courtship antics on a fallen log in April are the surest sign that spring is here, and next autumn's crop of birds is not far behind.



## 19 : *Ducks*

IT MAY SEEM a little odd to climb mountains to shoot ducks, but I may as well confess it has been done in order to take mallards. Although most pictures of ducks depict them at the mouth or estuary of a river or stream, or on the open flats of lakes or seas, a hunter is apt to take these birds just about anywhere. Probably the most shot at birds in the world, ducks have demonstrated powers little short of amazing in maintaining themselves as well as they have in the last twenty-five years. But there is no denying the fact that, if it weren't for Ducks Unlimited, we in North America would not, in all probability, still be enjoying the privilege of hunting these waterfowl. Because of international agreements, the control of legal hunting of all migratory birds, but particularly ducks, is probably better arranged and cared for than is true of the measures covering any other species.

For the casual hunter, duck hunting looks good from any angle, and it is. Some ducks are very sporting and many very palatable. Actually, there are many breeds of the order of *Anseres*, the most prized being the river or pond ducks, which include the mallard, black duck, widgeon, teal, shoveller, pintail, wood duck, and the redhead. It might be noted here, for those who would include the canvasback in that list, that the naturalists list it as a sea, or bay, or diving duck, for the reason that it has a broadly webbed or lobed hind toe, and will dive and feed on crustaceans and mollusks, while the above-named

ducks do not commonly dive or eat shell fish. In the group commonly known as sea ducks, the canvasback, scaup, ringneck, golden eye, bufflehead, old squaw, harlequin, eider, scooter, and ruddy duck, the flesh is most often not too agreeable, but is entirely edible while the ducks are on salt water. The names of all ducks are subject to local idiomatic variation, and the designations used here are the ones by which the ducks are universally recognized. So if the reader does not see the name of his favorite duck in the group, it does not mean that it is not there. There are many ducks (over seventy in each classification), and they are largely confined to the Northern Hemisphere, but those treated here will be limited to the common ducks of the North American continent.

Since ducks are migratory, flying with the seasons from the near reaches of the Arctic Circle to the environs of the tropics, a hunter may take the same species in a variety of places, on either or both coasts, in the interior, and on the Gulf of Mexico, and yet find subspecies sometimes sharply confined geographically, the black duck, for instance, which inhabits the Atlantic Coast exclusively.

As I have mentioned, it has been my fortune to shoot ducks after climbing a mountain to do it, and it was once a common practice for men to shoot the flights while riding horses that were gun broken. Punts, rafts, floating blinds—there is hardly anything that was not at one time legal and many times tried. Many of these time-tried methods are still current.

I can remember most vividly galloping across open country on a quarter horse from pothole to pothole, a plan I greatly preferred to sitting and freezing in a brush-covered punt, probably because this course proved more exciting and slightly more hazardous than the other. I might add that it takes some doing to hit a startled flock from a moving horse. But to treat the commoner forms of duck hunting, birds are probably taken more widely by hunters on foot than by any of the other refinements that men have devised over the past couple of centuries. If a man is lucky enough to have a blind on a lake, he goes to it with a pair of waders on, conceals himself thoroughly, and just sits

and waits for the flights to come by. He is a wise hunter if he has a good retriever, and if he owns a set of decoys and places them in good range and formation, he is likely to have the ducks coming nicely to him in no time at all—if flights are moving that day. The shooting is, of course, up to the man, but if he is like me, he will probably get one or two ducks out of, say, one hundred that pass, but if he is a good shot, he may come home with the bag limit, whatever it may be where he is hunting at the time. Frankly, I think ten ducks a month are enough for any man and his friends, and never should more than six be taken in one week. I realize that this is a very conservative statement, but it annoys me to beat the band to hear a man say he has shot one hundred or two hundred ducks during a few days of shooting. Worse, it is fools like him who have devastated our wildlife and made hunting a rare thing for millions.

There are other forms of duck enticement besides the use of decoys, which now, of course, must be artificial, not live ducks (or “English callers”), as in the old days. Calling devices are made by a number of manufacturers, and save for minor variations of timbre, are much alike in tone and volume. They serve an enormously useful purpose, especially when used with well-placed decoys from a blind. Many men whom I know are capable of producing such life-like duck calls with only their vocal chords and lips that they have to look out for the tyro who will shoot at the rushes in the hope of killing the quack. Sometimes the best I am able to do, even with a good duck call, is to bring other hunters to ask if I’m sick or have been accidentally shot. On the other hand, I have seen duck calls used so effectively that ducks came in easily without decoys’ being used at all.

Turning to the less complicated methods of hunting ducks, because most of us can’t afford expensive outfits, I’d say the only things necessary are a shotgun and some warm clothes. A pair of waders is desirable but not absolutely necessary. For this type of hunting, it is better to confine oneself to open wheat or corn lands, preferably dotted with puddles and ponds not necessarily containing much water. The seasons are, of course, set each year, and vary greatly with the area or country in which

the shooting is done. I have shot ducks in March in Mexico, but by December the season in British Columbia is usually closed. If there is an open season current, the hunter will find that he can go out to a grain-crop area and, by being nice to a farmer (a bottle of Scotch is nice), usually obtain permission to shoot over his fields or ponds. I don't advise shooting without the farmer's permission for several reasons. Sometimes he has a flock of tame mallards, an area seeded, or a distinct aversion to city hunters who pepper his house with buckshot, and he may even have a good shotgun himself. Most farmers are splendid people, and some of them have a distinct repugnance for ducks, for the simple reason that these waterfowl will clean out acres of the shoots of fall seeded plants in one night. These farmers encourage hunters, even though the slab-footed among the latter don't care how much land they muss up.

Having found such a set-up, the hunter should remember that the best times of day are dawn and dusk, the best weather, storm and wind. Ducks which often spend the better part of the day rafted up in the middle of a lake or out to sea will start winging ashore late in the afternoon in order to feed during the night. They are often still in the fields at dawn, and an early hunter, even without camouflage, can get good shooting at flights as they return to the safety of open water. If a stack of hay is near by, it is a good idea to plaster and stick as much of it around you as you can, or to make a loose blind and stay in it. If there is a pond handy, it is wise to get near it, because ducks prefer to skid in on the surface before waddling to the land to feed. The sound of the wings is often the first warning of a flight. The hunter soon becomes able to judge the nearness of ducks by this sound alone. Ducks that have been hunted extensively will shy away at the slightest sound or movement, and an up-turned white face is their cue for a quick evasive turn. For this reason, some duck gunners blacken their faces with burnt cork, or use mud, when they're hunting. There are tricks without number.

Since ducks are liable to come from any direction, a man is wise to take some time out at trap shooting, in order to improve

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his wing shooting. As related, I am not the world's best shot on flying birds, but I find that the best course for me is to rise quickly, then, when the birds wheel or tower upward, to squeeze on the lead bird. By doing this, I gain in two directions, the birds present more wing and body surface in this maneuver, and if I don't hit the leader (and often I don't), I'm often quite surprised to see the tail-ender go down. Experts can lead a particular or single bird so accurately that they don't miss any shots. Although I admire these men's shooting technique, I always come away with the uneasy feeling that they have too much of an edge on the ducks.

Shooting at a flight coming in low and directly in front of the hunter is probably the most difficult undertaking of all, for more than one reason. The target is small, fast moving, and, because the feathers are depressed flat toward the tail, many pellets will be deflected from the duck's streamlined body. Cross shooting requires very accurate leading, and many formulas are given by word and diagram—far too many to be given here. I'd say that a case of shells and a lot of *trying* will provide the best course of instruction. But even though you may become expert, you will find that you can lose the key some days. It is something like learning to balance peas on the edge of your knife, or kissing your wife or lady fair. Only practice and a species of intuition will make you successful. When a single duck or a flight has passed you, you have to be quick, but the pellets will enter the feathers more easily from the rear, and the birds, once past, will usually continue in the same line of flight, as they cannot see the hunter as easily as before.

Of the types of guns used, I prefer a double-barrel 12-gauge for ducks, because it gets off two shots faster than any other shotgun. It is even possible to fire both barrels at once, if desired. It usually isn't desired, though, because I have ended up sitting in a mud puddle from doing it accidentally, and on occasion have nursed a bruised shoulder for a couple of weeks after. Apart from its twin barrels, I like the 12-gauge because it has the most sporting and all-round firepower of any shotgun for hard-to-kill waterfowl, but it does have the disadvantage of

being heavy for a slightly built, or slow person. The pump action is good because it allows the hunter to keep his gun on the flight and get off three shots without breaking posture for reloading. The lucky men who have feather-weight automatic shotguns, or autoloaders, have probably the most effective gun for *more than* two shots, and they offer a distinct advantage in the field.

Most men I know like sizes of shot from No. 3 to No. 6 for ducks, but I have heard each size sworn by. I use No. 2 goose-shot, it seems to me, with just as much effect as the number 5's. To explain what shot sizes are, it is usually easier for a man to put a handful of sand in another's eyes (if he happens to be so inclined) than it is to hit him in the orb with one well-pegged rock. In other words, the higher the number indicated on the shell box or shell (apart from the gauge) the greater the number of pellets the shell will carry. This in turn means that the duck will have to fly through a larger concentration of No. 6 lead shot to the square foot of pattern than he would with No. 2. But, if the lead pellets are lighter (that is, smaller) than No. 6, they may not have sufficient weight to break bones or penetrate deeply.

The range of a shotgun is usually not over seventy yards, unless for some inexplicable ballistic reason an odd shot will wander out. Fifty yards is the range usually accepted as the effective extremity, but, as in every other phase of life, there are men who are ill-informed if not outright prevaricators about how far away they killed an animal or a bird. From the amount of useless blasting at birds that goes on, it would seem that few men know just how far fifty yards away is, or that they don't believe actual facts and figures arrived at from extensive tests. Let's call this overanxiety to get birds "optimism." These optimists, who will easily confuse a two-tailed jet at ten thousand feet with a flying duck, spoil more shooting for other hunters, or members of their party, than any other single nuisance. Don't be one of them! You will find you are left out of the companionship of mighty fine fellows, who are too kind to tell you about your gravest fault. Wait until the ducks come fairly close before

you shoot. As a matter of fact, if you aren't a right good shot, don't pay too much attention to the criticism well-meaning friends may direct at you for "ground sluicing" or shooting at just rising ducks. Shooting a few ducks that way will keep your heart up, and you will begin to be able to take them as they come in fast or on passing shots. From there on, it is just a matter of shooting enough until you become a passable wing-shot. But always remember the fifty-yard limit. A wounded duck dies and does no one any good, a well-shot one is a good dinner.

Some lucky hunters own duck punts. The punt and the permanent blind in good duck waters are the most effective means for taking waterfowl. Throw in a good dog, for retrieving the fallen birds, and few men could want a happier way to hunt. The forms of punts are many, but the lower the boat is on the water, but still safe, the better. For this reason, duck punts are usually wide for their length and slightly unwieldy, many having a high cowling that increases the freeboard. It is the practice of some duck hunters to deck the punt out in a carefully arranged covering of straw, sea weed, swamp grass, or reeds in order to simulate floating drift or a small tidal island. After this is done, the punt is paddled or rowed to a point on the lake, slough or river mouth where ducks are known to fly or feed. The punt is anchored, and the decoys set out on the water near by. One manner of setting decoys is to set them in a V-shape, with the point directed at the hunter, the idea being that the ducks will land inside the clear V and be easily shot. Another method is to set out two groups of blocks in circular formation, also designed to get the flying birds into more shootable position. Some hunters just pull decoys out of the sack and toss them around anywhere, with the argument that ducks don't form any definite formation on the water, and if such a regular distribution is seen by them, they will know it is phony. Who can talk duck language? So it may be a long time before the question is settled. Anyone who is going in for this more complicated method of duck hunting will usually have someone along with him to provide an initiation into the finer points, but I do advise going out with as many different duck hunters as possible, in order that



workable tricks may be picked up first hand, and thus mistakes avoided

For decoys I think everything from papier-mâché to inflated nylon has been used, but with a still strong emphasis on the old-fashioned wooden kind. My Dad used beautifully hand-painted cork decoys that bore shot marks from guns of hunters who stalked them and ground-sluced them at a few yards. They were bulky, but they were realistic. Also realistic are the inflatable decoys, of which a man can stow a dozen in his game pockets and still manage a thermos or a bottle of rum. Of course, there are the silhouette and collapsible wire and canvas types, but these are both designed for dry-land use. I myself have no preference for any particular type, because I find points for and against all types, depending upon the kind of hunting trip for which they are to be used, as well as the weather and water conditions.

For punt or blind hunting, clothes are perhaps the most important factor in the hunter's considerations. The main thing, obviously, is warmth, for the task of waiting in cold, cramped quarters is arduous and nerve-wracking. I've seen good shots who couldn't stand the cold or didn't dress warmly. They lost patience and spoiled shots by moving around, or became so chilled they couldn't bring a gun up quickly. My duck-hunting dress, for what it is worth, consists of two-piece, extra-heavy woolen underwear, two pairs of woolen sox, a cotton or fine-weave woolen shirt, a sweater, a pair of jeans, a pair of woolen pants, a good heavy duck-canvas or waterproof top jacket, and a pair of waders. Yes, put all of them on, with a good woolen, or fur-lined, earmuffed cap, and take along a thermos of hot tea or coffee. I like rum, too, but not until the shooting is over, particularly because rum, or any alcohol in drinks, opens the pores and boosts up respiration, then dissipates suddenly, allowing the body to drop in resistance. Many men have died subsequently of pneumonia for just that reason. Another good item on a duck-hunting trip is one of the new, large vacuum bottles or jugs, filled with soup, beans, or stew. Mmmm! Sounds good. Let's go!

Finding shootable locations has already been discussed in

part, but I'd suggest that once you've arrived on good water, you should watch for ducks in rafts or couples, feeding or resting. The ducks will probably get up unless they are stalked carefully, but when you arrive near the spot where you saw them last, look for old shotgun shells. Ducks have a habit of returning to feeding sites from season to season, and if there are old shells around the spot you've chosen, the chances are good that the birds will come back after you've got them up. Take good cover and sit patiently, if you have decoys, they should be out. This system is, of course, the walk or stalk type of hunting, requiring the hunter to mosey around with a shotgun, a few shells, and lots of ambition. As in pheasant or other upland bird hunting, a good dog is still the best friend the hunter can have. There is an old axiom among hunters that it is the man with the *best dog*, not the *best marksman*, who gets the most ducks. As a matter of fact, I have a friend who would blush if his name were printed, but Bill has a good dog—a very good dog—and he goes out each week end where the hunting is good, and the hunters thick, and returns home with his limit and the *same cartridge* he put in his single-barrel 12-gauge before he left home. Many thousands of ducks are mortally wounded each year and left for the coyotes and other predators to consume. A good dog will mark a falling duck in even a large area of reeds or brush and will dig the bird out of his hiding place in water plants or stubble efficiently when, in the same location, a man couldn't find a steaming kettle of hot rum. In field and pothole shooting, the dog is just as necessary as on water. Many times I've seen a mallard drift off in a small lake or swamp, without my having any hope of retrieving it in the absence of a dog. I've also stripped off and gone into the icy water for ducks, but other guys label this tactic "nuts," so I'm usually alone when I try it.

I remember four of us risking our lives once for two miserable widgeon hens on a small lake with only skim ice on it. We cut off a small dead tree with blasts from a shotgun, then three of us inched out on our bellies in a human chain, using the tree as a hook in the outer man's hand for a few more feet of reach, and after half an hour of grueling trouble, got them up on the

ice and slithered ashore. A man couldn't stand on that ice anywhere without going through, but we got our ducks. Such are the trials of duck shooting, or moseying around. Actually, I like this type of hunting as much as any. Sallying across farm country and scouting the odd swamp, pond, slough, creek, irrigation ditch, or what-have-you is good exercise and keening for the hunt. I've seen six or seven fat mallards get out of a swampy bit of marsh that didn't have enough water in it to put out a bonfire. Those green heads sat tight until I was within twenty feet of them, and all left in a blast that sounded like a rocket whooshing off. A good dog, working close, would have picked up their scent and given warning. I've found that pockets of low-lying land at the end of a field, just where the ground water leaves the cultivated field, often have one or two birds in the small pools of running water among the brush. As previously stated, late or early daylight hours will usually bring a flight overhead looking for feed to such areas as I have just described, and it is always wise, therefore, to keep the ears attuned to the whistle of fast wings.

Stalking a bunch of ducks, either on land or on water, is not supposed to be sporting in some circles. On my side of the tracks it is considered okay. Frankly, I think it is at least as much fun and as sporting as any other method. We stalk deer, a mild, timid animal that can't get out of the way half as fast as a rocketing duck. For the man who has only a shotgun and the desire to hunt, it is sometimes the only way possible. On seeing a bunch of ducks down, the hunter picks the most likely approach, obviously the course that gives the most shelter. Creeping on hands and knees around bushes, on a wet belly, through marsh, and over hummocks is arduous, but it is thrilling. I watch the ducks to find if all of them are feeding, preening, or resting. If I see a duck posted a little way out from the rest, its head up, I know the bunch is fairly wild to shooting. If they are all ducking, I wait until the majority of heads are under water, then move fast. If one bird picks me out, I either stay still until it preens or feeds again, or I make a sudden rush to gain yardage, then shoot as the flock gets up. Those with their heads in the water usually

try to spot the reason for rapid flight, then go up like rockets. The first few feet of rise requires good fast shooting, but the most bird is exposed to shot at this point. Try it some time. You might like it, and it will improve your stalking of all game.

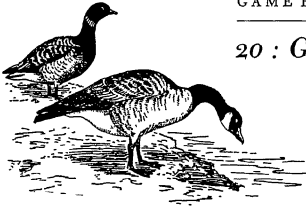
Of course, the lucky people who live in the flyways of the central United States and Canada will think most of the foregoing is much ado about nothing. Probably more birds are killed in a short time from punts or sloughs and from blinds in the wheat and grain fields than in all other branches of duck shooting. For a hunter who wants really to see duck hunting at its best, I recommend a trip to the middle western states and provinces. Many farms have well-located duck pits, which are actually nothing but holes in the ground, either planked or rough, into which hunters in varying numbers can crawl and sit, covered sparsely with straw. As the ducks come in to decoys, or wing over, or pitch into feed, the hunter gets fast and furious shooting. Hearing a mallard hit the stubble is a heart-pumping sound, while to see a high one come down and burst wide open from fat and feed is an almost unbelievable sight.

There is no doubt about it. These middle western birds are the best eating too. They have come in their prime from the northern summer grounds, and have fattened still more on the grain of the fields during their trek south. In some places and at some times, the flocks overhead don't stop coming all day long. A hunter can sit in a blind from sunup to sunset with almost continuous shooting.

Each duck has its characteristic habits which make it hard to shoot in one instance, but easy to take in another. The teal has a reputation for being hard to get. That, I think, is hardly justified. I've seen them come in on glare ice so fast that they would stun themselves on frozen driftwood, and one actually hit my boot as it went by. On this particular occasion, I was standing in the open, and there must have been twenty of them that came in around me, hit, and then scooted whenever I moved. I've seen them decoy to small, round pieces of driftwood in only fair light, and I've had them fly almost into my face at other times. They do fly fast, and a single bird on a cross-flight is hard to hit, but

I've risen, when I've been willing to take them, and watched a flock make three quick changes of flight in twenty yards, allowing me to level each time for perfect blasting into the tight formation, dropping four birds with two shells. Don't get me wrong. I like teal very much, but I don't like plucking them for what there is to eat, not when there are mallards or pintails around.

20 : *Geese and Brant*



THE .32 Winchester rimfire exploded with a puff of black smoke that engulfed Haro Furakowa and me, spreading a mantle of stinking black residue over the white snow. Out on the gray January seas, a noble black and white bird was kicking the water to a crimson froth. It was a black brant, the first goose I ever shot. We were about nine years old, and we had filched the rifle from under Haro's father's bed and gone ahuntin'. Later, much later in life, I spent many of the most enjoyable and uncomfortable hours of my life shooting the wisest of all water-fowl, geese.

The goose family is a large one, being of the order *Anseres*, family *Anatidae*, subfamily *Anserinae*, comprised of nine or ten genera and forty subspecies, twelve of which occur commonly in the United States and even more in Canada. Breeding usually in the far north and beyond into the Arctic Circle, the goose family has withstood the ravages of shooting very well. Perhaps the eyesight of a goose is as keen as that of the antelope. It is practically useless to try to stalk them, as they are wary to any movement within half a mile. My own conviction is that no other bird or animal is quite as alert to danger as the goose is, and the sentinels which are always posted, head erect, just never seem to miss seeing an approaching hunter. Even if there is cover at hand, the geese will for some inexplicable reason sense the nearing nimrod and lift swiftly from the water or ground.

I remember one frosty winter day when my brother Pat and I decided we could take some of the big Canada geese which were creating an unending symphony of murmuring and honking on the Thompson River near Kamloops, British Columbia. We drove north along the river in an old Model-A Ford, and even above the loud motor we could hear the murmur of geese. As we drove closer to the river, bands of geese got up and went winging swiftly away. Pat grinned at my disappointed face.

"Cheer up, kid," he laughed. "We're lucky we got this close. You want to goose hunt. You'd better look for disappointment."

We were at least a quarter of a mile away from the magnificent birds. From vantage points along the road I had noticed that the geese all seemed to be on the opposite shore of the river, none having gathered on our shore. It seemed strange, both shores being equal. I remarked about it to Pat.

"That is Indian Reserve land over there," he explained vaguely.

"Indian Reserve land? What has that got to do with it? Geese can't read."

Pat looked solemnly at me

"Can't they?" he asked. "Then, you explain why they stay over there!"

It takes some explanation. The white man is not allowed to shoot on Indian Reserve land. The Indians do shoot, but only when they are moved by some ancient spirit, or they are very hungry. The geese knew that on one side of the river they could be shot, and on the other they weren't likely to be disturbed. What made it all the more tantalizing was that the river was only a matter of one hundred yards wide in some places, and the big birds honked and murmured, oiled their feathers and dabbled their beaks in the sandy banks, and fluffed themselves up in little ponds. They did everything but thumb their noses at us, but I do think some of the honks had the definite tone of a raspberry salute. I looked at Pat as we strode along the bank.

"What are we going to do?" I asked.

He grinned

"Nothing, just mosey along and hope a goose gets up and

is goofy enough to come this way, on this side of the river. Something will sometimes scare them up."

About half an hour of miserable, cold waiting later, a noisy Indian truck clattered along the river road on the other side. Most of the geese paid no attention to it. But one scary bunch of twelve birds did get up, circle up-river, and put butterflies in our bellies by coming over to our side on the down-swing. We both went down into the willow bushes like jack-in-a-boxes. My heart was pounding. I heard the "*onkh-onkh—eank-eank*" of disturbed geese in flight. It was coming closer. Then the almost thunderous whisper of the six-foot wings just in front of us. When the whisper of pinions became a hiss we both jumped up with glee in our hearts. The sun was in front of us and the birds so low that all we could see were black outlines. Ten of the immense forms came over us, within twenty-five feet, and we both fired twice. Not a feather came from aloft as we reloaded and strove for passing shots. My eyes bugged out of my head as the sun caught the back view of the immense birds. They were almost pure white with a wingspread of seven or eight feet.

Trumpeter swans!

Down on the edge of the river, just around the clump of taller alder, the geese sailed by, laughing their derisive cry at us. Pat and I just gaped, mouths open. Those devilish geese had disturbed a flight of trumpeter swans with their anxious rise, and had flown in behind them down our side of the river, then, when the swans raised our shots, the geese sailed on the outside of the alder thicket, with full protection from shooting. Their only natural course was across the top of us, as the spit we were on jutted into the river, low and open to passage. The swans had been so big in comparison that we thought they were geese coming in low with the sun silhouetting them from behind. Thank goodness our aim was confused and we missed the swans! We spent a miserable cold day on the river, and when the sun went down we had one Canada goose. But that was a *good* goose hunt! Some men spend weeks to get even one.

Geese, like many other species, have very regular habits, unless they are consistently disrupted in the pursuit of their daily



feed and gravel. I remember one shocking massacre that occurred out of this regularity. The birds in this case were blue geese, or, as they are commonly called locally, wavies. On Vancouver Island near Port Alberni, there is a small pothole lake scarcely a quarter of a mile wide by half a mile long, completely surrounded by grain and corn fields, well brushed with reeds on the edges. Forty wavies came in on this lake one night while we were decoying widgeon and teal. They were still out of season for about two weeks. When the season came in, the birds were used to the lake and fields. I got two out of the flock the first day of the season, and I think ten were killed the first night flight. Word got around that geese were on Thompson's Lake, and soon the rushes around that pothole were hardly as thick as the hunters. Each night the geese came in, and each night the hunters thinned them out. Three weeks later there were four birds coming in each night out of the original forty. One Sunday evening, a single hunter dropped three of the birds as they circled three times, trying to come in on their favorite spot. The lone survivor winged off over the forest, and that was the end of the goose shooting at that location. Why a bird that won't let a hunter get within half a mile of it will consistently fly back, night after night, to a place where it has seen its companions killed each time they enter, is a mystery to this hunter.

Jack Lillington, better known to the world as the fine outdoors columnist, "Pintail," related a story I think is amusing on geese habits. Jack says:

"Anyone knows geese don't come in until dusk, or evening. But, let me tell you this one. We were up in the Caribou on a shoot, and I happened to ask if there were any geese around. A lad there told us that a flock came in on the lake at three o'clock in the afternoon. My partner and I figured he just didn't care much about accuracy. Three o'clock, four o'clock, five o'clock. What does time mean in hours in that wild country? Anyway, we went down to the lake early to look it over and get settled in a spot to shoot. We found it and sat around having a smoke. First thing we knew, a flock of big honkers came floating in and we up and shot a couple after a few calls. I looked at my watch

by chance after we had gathered our birds. By golly! Do you know it was just 3.15 p. m.? Figure it out for yourself."

In brant hunting things are a little different. The brant is the smallest of the geese, not much larger than a good big mallard drake, but this species will do the craziest things. I had been brant hunting haphazardly before, tossing a few decoys in the salt-chuck off a beach in the vicinity of where they fed, ducking behind a log when the black wings came in over the silent gray sea. But, until I met Norm McDonald and spent a few days in a real brant blind, I didn't realize that brant and brant hunters are a different breed.

In the first place, the black brant is a sea goose, a bird almost never found off the salt sea water, a denizen of the North Pole in the summer, a latecomer to the southlands in the autumn, a tourist traveling as far south as California and Mexico in the winter. To me, he is the prince of waterfowl, at once wise, unpredictable, stupid, and cagey, a bird that usually flies so slow and so low that you invariably fire over him or in front of him. If you've been shooting teal and pintails all season, and you lead on brant, you usually end up with lots of shooting but no eating.

The call of a brant sounds something like "*kerrplunk*," as if a deep chord had been hit and the string tightened just at the end of the note. It is possibly more forlorn and heart-rending even than the plaintive call of a lone glaucus gull. Brant will come to a good imitation of their call without decoys, since they are gregarious, always, it seems, searching for other brant. They pool up in the Pacific Coast sounds in such massive formations that the water looks as if it were painted in areas of acres with black tar.

There are three commonly-used methods of taking brant, and a brant hunter usually has in his possession, or at his disposal, from twenty-five to fifty huge black-and-white decoys. The hunter chooses one of the three plans in disposing his decoys: he can toss them off a sandy beach near shore, row out to sea near the shallow feeding grounds of brant in his punt and set them out, or he may use a concrete, or wooden pit or blind

far out at sea, around which the set of decoys is carefully placed. He then sits and waits, watching the horizon with binoculars, or, if his vision is good, with his eyes. The birds fly almost always on the water, almost on top of the waves. A good hunter, like Norm MacDonald or his son Bill, can spot them with the naked eye when a non-brant hunter can't even see the image.

Brant feed almost entirely at sea, on eel grass, but, unlike other ducks that take to the sea, they never taste fishy until the end of the winter stay in the South. The reason for this sudden fishiness is not a change of diet by the brant, but because, at the end of their visit to the warmer climes, herring have usually deposited their eggs on the eel grass, and the brant, using it as their sole food, have to take it with the eggs on it. Very soon after this spawning of the herring, the brant takes itself north to the environs of the Arctic Pole, and I think they may do it to get away from the stink of fish that they have acquired. The birds need gravel and sand for their digestive process, so after feeding all day in rafts at sea, they will start to come in toward the beaches. This is the time that they are shot at most. However, brant have no regular feeding or gravelling hours that hunters can agree upon. I have seen them skirting the beaches and calling at early light, at midday, and when the sun is down on the horizon.

You can sit in a well-placed punt or blind all day and not see a brant closer than a mile with your binoculars, but you can sit in the same spot on the same kind of day with the same kind of tides, and brant will be coming in in bunches almost quarter-hourly. They will fly right into gunfire, then circle back over several fallen comrades, until the whole flock plummets into the water one by one. At other times they will sheer off at three hundred yards, and it doesn't matter how well concealed the blind is, how well set out the decoys, nor how true the calling, they won't come near you. It is common to hunt for three weeks to a month in a vicinity where brant may be seen in the air all day long, yet not a bird will decoy to a flock of wooden images. On the other hand, you can get out of your blind and smoke, talk, horse around, and laugh, when suddenly, as you look at your

decoys, a flock of indignant brant will be sitting there eying the wooden dummies with curious glances. They will even sit there while you plunge for your guns and shoot them. But you can never depend on having just that to happen!

Goose hunting on the prairies and plains of central northern United States and Canada is only slightly different from brant hunting at sea. Geese will come in almost anywhere on the cut-over grain fields, but instead of a punt or blind and floating decoys, a set of goose silhouettes is often used in combination with a pit dug in the stubble of a field. The use of a shovel, levered by a strong back, is indicated. The general idea is to find out where a flock of geese usually feeds in a big field. They pick up grain lost in harvesting, and love the small new crops and grasses. Feeding is usually the same direction from a given point each day, so the hunter tries to find the edge of their last feeding. Here he digs his pit with the reasonable certainty that the birds will come in at the spot they are used to and feed toward him. Old goose hunters can usually find the direction of feed from droppings and observation of geese from afar. Pit digging is done, obviously, after the geese have left for their bedding-down spot at night. The hunter should be in position the following day, well before the time the geese usually come in.

Other methods are to find a flyway used by geese between their feeding and resting grounds and dig a pit, or get behind a hummock over which they will fly, or camouflage oneself with straw. However you do it, it will be pass shooting and none too consistent, because the birds sometimes fly very high, and at others they may come over the stubble with their wing tips disturbing the loose straw and dust as they fly. A Canada goose hitting the stubble from forty yards up, after meeting a charge of lead shot, sounds to the gunner as if he had brought down a sack of wheat. If there aren't any more birds flying at the moment, even a seasoned hunter may be pardoned if he scrambles for a look at the fallen prize. For this magnificent bird is majestic in size, going well over forty inches in length and up to twenty pounds in weight. A hunter never forgets a good goose shot, but he may not recall hundreds of equally perfect duck shots.

In goose hunting, I like 30-inch barrels (an extra set for a double gun is the ticket), choked full, and in repeaters with choking devices, the choke should be moved to full. If I had my "druthers," I'd insist on an over-all barrel length of 30 inches, including choking device, even in a repeater, when I set out for either ducks or geese. For there is a relationship between barrel length and range—the greater the barrel length up to a point, the greater the effective range—and even inches in waterfowling will sometimes make a difference. The idea behind full-choke shotgun patterns with these birds is heavy concentration of shot, which gives added killing power, though naturally at the expense of size of pattern. But a wide, relatively open pattern is no good for hard-to-kill, extremely fast fliers like geese and ducks. If you can't shoot close enough with a full-choke at reasonable ranges, you'd better not depend upon a "flier" that is supposed, by some intervention of Providence, to plunk the waterfowl squarely in the eye and send him crazily to earth.

Shells should be of the "super" variety, in a 12-gauge, this means  $3\frac{3}{4}$  drams of powder backing  $1\frac{1}{4}$  ounces of shot. This contrasts with  $3\frac{3}{4}$  drams of powder and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ounces of shot for upland game like quail. Here I cannot overemphasize the importance of a good recoil pad, and additionally, some good padding on the hunter himself, for there is no denying the fact that these recommended loads are powerhouses, with enough free recoil to produce a jarring effect, especially if there is much shooting. Ordinarily the duck and goose gunner is saved from a mauling by the infrequent shooting. But, as I say, whether your luck brings you little or much shooting, a really good, live, well-designed recoil pad of rubber will make the difference between enjoyable hunting for waterfowl and a badly bruised shoulder and a stiff headache at the end of the day.

You may use what you like best in shotgun gauges. A 20-gauge seems to me a trifle light for this man's work, and a 16 gives no advantage, even of weight or recoil, that compensates for the better all-round performance of the standard 12-gauge. Tens used to be much in vogue for goose and duck hunting, and in barrel lengths running up to 34 inches—veritable blunder-

busses, they were—but I have always thought of them as accoutrement for the meat hunter, not the sportsman who has today's advantages in smokeless powders, better engineering achievements in cartridge making, and extraordinary precision in the mass production of firearms. No, I don't think anything larger than a 12-gauge is necessary for waterfowling.

But for geese in particular I think that the larger sizes of shot are very definitely in order. The shot perhaps most commonly used to break the large bones is No. 2, which is also often called "goose shot" or "goose load." A larger bird needs a heavier more powerful load to kill it cleanly. Hunters who use for ducks such loads as Nos. 6, 7, and 8 are taking chances on wounding, but not dropping, geese. It seems to many outdoorsmen that more respect is due the monarch of the marshes. Snow geese, however, are birds that can be handled with a light duck gun and a coarse shot, since they are small and not much larger than a black brant.

The flight of the geese in good range is easy to target. Geese do not as a rule fly fast, and when they come in to decoys, then start to lift as the hunter rises to shoot, they present an enormous target area as compared with other waterfowl. If you get them in close you shouldn't miss. The trouble is trying to get them in close!

None but the warmest clothing should be worn in goose hunting, because most of the "action" consists of sitting still in a pit or blind, often in snow and sleet, and always in frosty, nippy weather. Either get a big breakfast or take a full-sized lunch and supper with you, as well as a vacuum of hot tea or coffee.

Don't expect to be successful at shooting geese your first year of hunting. If you get one in two years, you are running a good international average. And watch out or you will find you have more money invested in equipment for goose hunting than your wife has in her entire wardrobe and kitchen! Everyone knows the superb appeal of roast goose. Perhaps that is why hunters put up with the agonies of cold, sleet, and digging and building blinds.

Sure, I'll go out with you tomorrow. *Why*, I don't know!

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*Predators: Animals and Birds*

THERE is no disputing that mankind is the greatest predator of all. It is unnecessary to qualify this statement in any way. The fact that the North American continent contained an abundance of all species of game in the year 1492, but in the twentieth century reveals depletion wherever man has moved in, cannot be ignored. If you are a hunter or fisherman, you indulge to some extent your predatory instincts. Putting the question in its baldest form: if you want to indulge your predatory instincts, you must control, or mitigate, similar instincts in other animals. The steady reduction of game species is not entirely chargeable to a single condition—not to hunting and fishing, for example, nor to commercial enterprises such as farming, mining, logging, commercial fishing, trapping, nor any other endeavors that open up a new country, but to all of them. The countryside that is most conducive to the livelihood of abundant wild life is also the countryside that is most appealing to mankind for settlement. Man easily takes the choicest lands, forests, and streams and devotes those natural surroundings to his comfort and convenience. The wildlife must then seek the less productive lands, there to live as best it can or perish because of starvation, the elements, and predation. This, in short, is what has happened to the game of North America.

The answers to the problem of more bountiful game are three things, conservation of the game remaining, propagation

BOOK I : *Hunting*

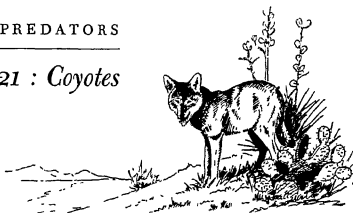
of future game, control of predation. In the latter phase the sportsman can co-operate more fully with the departments and organizations designed to promote wild life than he can with the other two. By taking and killing known predators, the sportsman is only looking after the future of other game animals. It need not be pointed out whose future this is. My experiences in the woods and on the streams are limited, and my remarks are only from observations made and recorded. Because the predating animals and birds cross over into each other's hunting precincts, it has been thought best to devote a short note to each.



PREDATORS

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21 : *Coyotes*



THE COYOTE, prairie wolf, or *Canis latrans* Say, is one of the natural North American dogs. In full coat, he looks much like a large Spitz breed of dog, or a miniature German police type. Many coyotes go unharmed by hunters just because of these resemblances. A hunter, unused to the sight of the coyote, will often think the wily little predator is a farmer's dog. Since the coyote ranges from the middle eastern provinces and states to the Pacific seaboard, north to the Arctic Circle and south to Mexico, he is familiar to most experienced hunters. Standing around twenty inches at the shoulder, up to four feet long, and ranging from twenty-five to forty pounds in weight, the animal packs enough power to take all birds and small game. Congregating in packs, it commonly destroys members of the deer family. A coyote will eat almost anything but an alarm clock: live game, carrion, leather shoe-laces, mocassins, dung, and poisoned bait. Well respected by the Indians, who called it "Old Man Coyote" in some of their legends, it can be very trusting of mankind. I shot a full-grown coyote in country with good cover using only No. 2 goose shot in a choke-barreled shotgun. I have also seen coyotes move away from me at almost five hundred yards when I took one step forward.

I estimate the hunting of coyotes as a sport, not only because it is not only entertaining, but also because it is downright helpful to the propagation and conservation of all game. Unfor-

tunately, the hide smells like that of a dog, and the meat is undesirable for the fastidious. I know men who have had to eat coyote meat, and who say that it is not unpalatable once you forget it comes from a dog. After all, the Chinese are a race of ancient culture, but they breed a relative of the coyote's, the chow dog, for the table. As to the hide itself, it tans up well, and from the hard-worn coats with fur collars that I have seen on many women, I'd say the fur of a coyote is durable and not bad in appearance. I had a lady, who knew I was interested in wild animals, ask me what the trim on her coat was. When I told her coyote, she asked me what that was. I told her it was a North American wolf. She asked me if a wolf wasn't a *dog*. I admitted that I thought so. Why she got so mad, I don't know. The coat was a quite pretty and serviceable garment. However, I have never been able to convince my own wife that the fox is also a dog, just as the coyote is. The reason for bringing that up is that the trapper only receives a few dollars for coyote, but many for fox. For this reason the coyote is only trapped off when he becomes a nuisance.

Never actually having witnessed the killing and hunting of coyotes with the various breeds of long-legged hounds of the plains and prairies, I've only heard that it is a good sport, really worthwhile. The same applies to running coyotes with horses and shooting them with rifles. But of taking coyotes by hunting on foot with a rifle, I know a little.

A hunter is likely to run onto a coyote almost anywhere. Many years ago, while I was at a summer sheep camp high up at about ten thousand feet altitude, I saw my first coyote really close. I had shot half a dozen grouse a short distance from camp, then become hopelessly lost. One of my rules in such cases is to go in a straight line until I hit water, find the direction of the flow, and follow it. Having found the stream, I sat down to have a smoke and a moment of relaxation. The almost still, sunlit air was wafting the smoke of my cigarette downstream, and I was idly watching it, ruminating on what sort of a story I'd cook up to explain my absence from breakfast.

A movement beside the creek, on the side down which I had

come before crossing over, caught my eye. I stayed perfectly still, watching the golden coat of the coyote as the head bobbed up and down scenting my trail. I saw the animal lick at something, then a feather disappear into its mouth. The coyote had smelled the blood of the prairie chickens I was carrying and was following my trail in the hope of a feed. It stopped suddenly as my trail crossed the creek. In a split second its eyes focused from its reared head directly upon me. I swung my rifle up, but before I could get it to my shoulder, the coyote had sprinted the fifty yards to cover and disappeared. This experience taught me one thing about coyotes, that they will follow a man carrying game. Since then I have been able to put that knowledge to work. If I'm packing game in fairly open country, I sit down in the middle of a clearing, keeping close watch on my back trail. Many times I have seen coyotes come into the open and skirt the brush at the edges of the cover I have left. The best shot I have made with open sights is just at three hundred yards.

I remember one shot at a coyote that made me very proud at the time. I had been tracking a herd of moose for over three hours, after finding twenty beds on a birch-covered hillside. The tracks led to several hundred acres of burned country that proved to be a man-trap of fallen logs. I started into the fallen stuff and, after about half an hour, sat down exhausted, searching for an easy way out. The coyote that had been following me had circled, and when I sat down among the logs he had evidently lost sight of me. He got up on top of stumps and logs twice, waved his nose around in the cold air, trying to pick up my drifting scent. The third time he got up I had moved into prone position and was ready for him. At somewhat over three hundred yards with an old Ross .303 British and open sights, I drew just above his head and squeezed off. In true coyote fashion, he leaped high into the air and fell in a heap. He had a lovely whitish grey coat and was big for a coyote, going almost fifty pounds, judging by heft.

I have noticed in each animal I have hit a tendency to jump straight up in the air with the muzzle pointing skyward. There seems to be a belief that, if a coyote jumps like that, you have

him dead to rights. But, I have also seen a coyote jump straight up at the sound of a rifle shot, and then streak away like a scared rabbit, leaving no sign of blood or injury.

Coyotes, as I have earlier suggested can be hunted anywhere. I have seen them on densely forested mountain tops, and on open plains and frozen lakes. They go where there is game to feed them. If you find evidences of rabbits, grouse, field mice, ducks, or geese, you will find the tracks and dung of coyotes around. When you kill any large game animal, it is a good idea to drag some of the unwanted meat or entrails along the ground to an open spot. A heavy chunk of shoulder bone with bullet shocked meat on it is good coyote bait. The idea of leaving it in the open is to permit you to approach it from a good distance, and yet keep under cover yourself for a good shot.

In the winter time, where the snow stays on for any considerable period, the tracks of coyotes cross and criss-cross almost every open spot and road you are likely to follow. You will usually see the animals hanging about the edges of short brush near the borders of an open meadowland or valley, often sitting on their haunches panting like a tuckered-out bird dog, or just sitting, watching you. Like crows, they distrust mankind where they have been regularly hunted. There is a widespread belief that the coyote will come teasingly close if the man is without a gun, but will stay hidden if he is carrying one. I can't say whether this is so, but I do say it is improbable. Dogs do not have exceptionally keen eyesight, except for movement. But the fact that I carried a gun did not seem to make any difference to a coyote at any time. I have seen coyotes hit for cover as soon as they saw me without a gun, and I have had one sit and watch me in well-hunted country while I was packing a rifle openly. I walked at an angle just wide of the coyote for three hundred yards without looking him full face. When I knew he was in good range, I snap-shot and killed him while he was still sitting wondering just where I was heading. Maybe he was a dumb coyote, but all I did was give the impression, by stopping and examining the ground ahead of me occasionally, that I was tracking another animal. Well, it worked!

Any ordinary rifle will kill a coyote easily. The bone structure in these animals is not heavy. A .22 caliber, even the "short" cartridge, will kill at distances under one hundred yards. Any of the hot varmint rifles are good, and the flat-trajectory, high-speed, long-range rifles such as the .218 Bee, 220 Swift, .222 Remington, .22-250 and .22 Savage Highpower, give the hunter a good chance at the animal. A scope is always helpful, but not absolutely necessary, if one's eyes are good. I remember reading of one hunter who shot fifteen coyotes through the lungs with a .30-'06 rifle without taking one of them. I don't believe it. I have witnesses to prove it that one No. 2 goose shot driven into the lungs of a coyote put the animal down in twenty-five yards, and there wasn't another mark on his fat, healthy body. But I don't think there is too big a slug for a coyote. And you might remember that a coyote can easily gobble down a rabbit, a duck, a pheasant, or a grouse a day the whole year round. He will hunt deer, moose, elk, goat, sheep, and any other hard-pressed animal in snow. In packs, coyotes often chase deer out onto glare ice; then, when the animal loses its footing on the slippery surface, they will eat chunks out of it as it struggles while it is still alive. There is no more pitiful and heart-rending sight. They will attack any animal that is foundering in deep snow.

So—a dead coyote means a lot of live game.

22 : *Cougars*

C OUGAR hunting is only for the valiant, the quick, and the patient. I had hunted twenty years, and had twice been trailed by cougars, but all I ever saw during those two decades was the quick brownish flash of a disappearing body. When I really went after the big cats seriously, it was with a man who has probably killed more cougars than any other living person, and two of the best cougar dogs in the world. I was prepared for sport, but not for the awe-inspiring, breath-taking pursuit and kill that it proved to be.

The cougar, mountain lion, puma, panther, painter, catamount, or, as the naturalist calls him, *Felis concolor*, is probably one of the most misunderstood animals in the animal kingdom. The biggest misunderstanding relates to his courage. The king of the cats is not yellow, he is clever, courageous to a fault, and a terrific fighter to boot. He can and will make short work of a pack of five or six dogs, and there is nothing the expert cougar hunter fears more than a cougar that won't tree. This fear is prompted by the knowledge that the lion will often kill or maim a whole pack that had taken the hunter years to train, before the hunter can come up to join the battle.

Like grizzly bears, all cougars are usually lumped into one family, yet some of them are as wide apart in appearance as the Kodiak and the Rocky Mountain silvertip. I have seen massive, ten-foot, 250-pound tom cougars with heads similar in size to

that of an African lioness, and red as rust in the body. At the opposite end of the scale is the ninety-pound, fullgrown, small-boned, seven-foot cougar, with a tiny wicked head that looks like a knot tied on a bulging potato sack, honey-yellow in color, with a distinct black stripe running from the top of the head to the tip of the tail, and meaner than cat-scrap in disposition. Both of these cougars, living within fifty miles of each other, would make one wonder if the breeds are the same. And from Oregon south into Texas and Mexico, the presence of a small-limbed, small-headed, big-bodied cat, almost gray in color, would make one wonder if perhaps environment was not also a major factor in differentiation. The truth is, the cougar was the most widely prevalent animal in the Western Hemisphere, having at one time ranged from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts, and north almost to the Arctic Circle, and south into the Argentine, before its natural food supply was cut off by the advances of civilization. However, there is little danger of its extinction because of its cunning and its ability to adapt itself to the high reaches of the mountains.

The types of country most likely to harbor cougars are those with terrain and flora which are conducive to breeding deer, goats, sheep, elk, rabbits, and grouse—in other words where the browse animals are likely to be found. But don't bother to go after a cougar without dogs. I know several expert hunters and trappers who have gone out on fresh snow tracks, not an hour old, and spent as many as three days sleeping out and trailing the animal, in the hope of getting a shot at it. No man that I have ever heard of has taken a cougar by trailing it without dogs, although I know of two men who shot cougars while in the bush. In one case the cougar jumped clear over the head of Jack Blower's nephew (a boy of eight years), and was blasted down by Jack, who was an ex-professional camp hunter. The other was shot by Roy McTaggart, a really exceptional hunter, when his keen eyes saw it slink out into a dry logging slash when he was still-hunting for deer.

Cougars will kill human beings. I have recorded proof of two deaths of young boys, and of two full-grown men who were

mauled by the animals without provocation by either. Ned Spicer, a well-known and truthful logging operator, since deceased, told me of a cougar he had killed with a double-bitted falling ax. At first I was inclined not to believe his story, due to my own experiences, but as he related it, the reasons became clear for the cougar's attack. Spicer was on one of his shingle-bolt flumes, which led down from the top of a mountain, from which he was removing yellow-cedar timber. As he came around a bend of the flume, he saw ahead of him a full-grown tom cougar. A flume, in case you don't know what it is, is a V-shaped trough, about thirty inches wide at the top, with a ten-inch flat bottom on the inside of the V. Filled with water, it was the old-fashioned means of taking shingle bolts down the side of a mountain. Standing room in the narrow bottom was usually slippery, and, to say the least, confined, as the flume will sometimes be fifty feet above the surrounding terrain, with nothing between the trough and the ground but a spindly network of superstructure. It was here that Ned Spicer met his cougar.

He realized that, if he turned around in the narrow-gutted flume, the animal could hit him in the back with one jump. For about two minutes the cougar looked at him balefully, then, instead of turning and going back, as Spicer thought it would do, it crouched low and moved like a snake toward him. He says he never before in his life wanted to scream, but he was so scared he couldn't utter a sound. He waited until the animal had crouched about ten feet from him, at which moment he stepped forward. The action had the desired effect, of getting the animal out of its ready crouch for a spring. As it raised up, Spicer again stepped forward and raised his sharp, double-bitted ax, swinging as the animal sprang at him. His ax blade drove into the shoulder at the join of the neck, and the tearing claws raked his arm. The animal bit him in the leg as it dropped beside him in the flume, but with a desperate swing he sunk the four inches of knife-like falling ax into the cougar's skull. It never moved again.

I asked him a few questions about the animal itself. He told me that it was a very old tom cougar with a gray muzzle, and



that one of its eyeteeth was gone. It had a scruffy top coat and was thin in the body—altogether one of the most repulsive animals he had ever come across. The hide, which was badly urine-stained, he told me, wasn't worth the taking, so he had dumped the animal off the flume to rot. He told me the bones were still there to be seen. Although I honor even wildest claims of my friends, I had to see the situation for myself. I went up the mountain on his flume and found the bones of the cat with some of the hair still lying between them. Two men I questioned in the area said they remembered Spicer's telling them about the incident at the time, and they said another of the men, who had subsequently left the district, went up and looked the animal over, because he wanted a cougar skin for himself.

Recently, a miner in his cabin a couple of hundred miles north of Vancouver, B. C., was attacked and mauled by a cougar. The animal came right into the cabin when the miner was in his bunk. At first the man couldn't believe his eyes, but he jumped out of his bunk and picked up a frying pan, in the belief that the animal was a cowardly thing and would rush out again, having entered the cabin by mistake. Instead, the animal came for him, and in the ensuing *melée* the man was clawed and bitten from head to foot. Finally, he plunged a butcher-knife into the animal until it fell away wounded and dying. The man was himself so badly wounded that he spent several weeks in the hospital. Death would have been the price to a weaker individual than the wiry, bush-toughened prospector and miner.

The relative courage of the cougar among animals of its natural habitat has often been debated. Trappers say the cougar will tackle either a wolf or a bear with all the courage of a gladiator, even though the timber wolf matches it in size, and a small, full-grown black bear easily outweighs it by from fifty to two hundred pounds. What do you think of a little, sawed-off guy, about 120 pounds, soaking wet, tackling a heavyweight boxer? Lots of guts? Yes! But foolhardy! Merely because the cougar is cunning and avoids open conflict with man does not, to my mind, make it a coward.

A friend of mine, well-armed with a .32 Special rifle and lots

of bullets, heard the darndest commotion in the bush on the other side of the ridge from where he was hunting. The bawls, roars, screams, and growls were so downright blood-curdling that they stopped him with one foot in midair, and the foot was shaking when he put it down. After about five minutes of arguing with himself, he finally convinced his better judgment that he would be a coward if he didn't creep to the top of the ridge and, at least, peek over.

Peering from the safety of a rocky ridge, he saw one hundred feet below him a cougar and a bear fighting. He was so impressed by the fury of the scrap and the flying blood and flesh that his knees became weak, and he had to sit down. His hand was shaking so much that he told himself he didn't dare shoot. As he put it "Criky! If they were doing what they were doing to each other, what the hell would they do to me? I sneaked away." He told me that he went back to camp unnerved and found that three of the four other fellows were all in camp for unexplained reasons. Later that evening, he says, he asked one of the men casually if he had heard anything in the bush during the morning. All three men eyed him with guilty glances and admitted they had heard the terrific din, but that it had so unnerved them they headed back to camp. The fight was between a *small* cougar and a big black bear.

Fortunately, I was brought up in timber country where it is still necessary to travel ten miles to get out of the overhanging shadows of the 150-foot fir and cedar trees. Living as a boy of seven, just arrived from the prairies in that bush country, I was, of course, always wanting to see a bear or cougar in real life. At least I thought I wanted to see one, until I saw the black shape of a cougar etched against the faint light of falling darkness only one hundred feet above me on the bald rock bluffs. At first I didn't recognize the animal in the gathering gloom. It appeared that what I saw might be only a bush. But it moved down the hump of the ridge to where the trail I was on met the winding road.

I stared at it in disbelief and with fear in my belly, then I started to walk faster. It moved quickly down the rocky face

toward a point at which the rock-cut from the road building hung about fifteen feet over the highway. I started to trot, but it moved faster. Something inside me seemed to burst, and I ran pell-mell toward my home, which was about one hundred yards away. Maybe Heaven lent my feet wings, or at worst the Devil goosed me with his three-pronged fork. I made it under the rock-cut, just ahead of the animal, and onto the small bridge over the ravine. As my frightened feet pounded out of immediate reach on the bridge planks, I heard the most gawdoffal scream, something between the wail of a stricken horse and the blood-chilling notes of carnivores from Africa. I felt as if a cold icicle had been dropped down my back. As I rounded the bushes into the property, I saw the black shape clearly etched against the light sky.

My Dad had to wait a couple of minutes before I could get enough breath to tell him disjointedly what had happened. He smiled and told me I was probably imagining things. He tried to put me at ease with the story that cougars never attack human beings. It was several years later that he admitted it was a cougar, that one had been seen in the neighborhood at the time, but that he had not wanted me to become unnecessarily alarmed. He also related at the same time that one morning, when he had awakened early, he had been surprised to see a she-bear leaning in his bedroom window, and that he himself could not believe it until he got up and she moved away with her two cubs, which had been browsing in our kitchen garden. That was thirty years ago. At that time we caught several deer in the open sea by going after them in rowboats, after the cougars had chased them into the water near our home. Only three years ago, in this same (now suburban) district, three cougars were killed on the edges of the big-home areas. The reports of these animals were phoned in by the residents. One cougar was killed by a uniformed constable with his service revolver.

In order not to confuse the reader, I might explain that Greater Vancouver is a city of some half million population, set on the rim of a harbor which is next to a range of mountains falling almost directly into the sea. Five miles from the center

of the city puts the hiker in virgin timber, which is much the same as it was when the white barbarians first came to this great land. The edge of our outlying suburbs adjoins forest and mountains that extend for hundreds of miles northward, so it is no wonder that the wild animals occasionally come out of those vast reaches and stay a short time on the edge of man territory.

Perhaps the scare I had with the cougar as a boy made me want to see more of them—along the sighting plane of a good rifle. Several times when hunting deer, I thought I was being trailed, but I could never catch more than a flash of color. Finally on one hunting trip, I back-tracked in a narrow canyon to find fresh pug marks covering my own footprints, left only ten minutes before in the sand of the creek bed. I back-tracked several times that day and found the same evidence twice more. The cougar stayed on my trail for seven hours and was still trailing me as sundown darkened the canyon. I actually got a full view of it, above and behind me just as nightfall began to obscure things, but it was gone so quickly I didn't even have time to lift my rifle. Needless to say, I look upon that day of hunting as the most nervous of all that I spent in the wilderness. I even yelled at it, "Damn you! Come and try me out." I was that frustrated and angry—as well as scared. Needless to say, the animal had better sense. There were other experiences.

While I was on the territorial police force on Vancouver Island, I mentioned my hate of cougars to James Dewar, who was game warden, and is now chief predator hunter for the British Columbia Game Department. Jim was originally a first-rate predator hunter, trapper, and bushman before going with the department, almost as wild as an animal himself. He had once killed a cougar with his bare hands when it took his lead hound's head in its mouth. He hated the "cats" with a malignant emotion. He suggested that I hunt with him on the week ends and my days on shift work. Of course I was happy about the prospect. Jim had killed in the neighborhood of a thousand cougars, and at the time trained and owned some of the top cougar dogs in the world.

We hunted for eight months and covered hundreds of miles

of tough mountain timber and bush country before we put down our first two cougars, and they were bagged in one hunt. These cougars were killed, after telephoned information that a fresh kill had been found by a logger, twenty miles back in the bush. What I am getting at here is that, with the best dogs in the world and one of the best cat hunters in existence, it took us eight months of hunting to connect with the cougar, in country where the cats abound. In other words, don't pay too much attention to a guide who tells you he can take you out and get you a cougar, unless he has had a report of a fresh kill near by.

The hunt itself is spectacular. There is nothing daintier than a hound dog sniffing the tiniest twig for scent, and nothing more blood-tingling than seeing the dog raise its trained muzzle and howl at the sky. By that sign you know you're at least on a cold scent. How many days after the scent has been deposited it can still be detected, I don't know. I have seen dogs go like mad on scent that you would think would bring a cougar up in a mile, but have seen the same dogs half an hour later as calm as puppies, sunning and licking themselves, with no concern for the animal that they had so recently been raising a ruckus about. I've look in amazement at Jim at such times and heard him say, "I'll be gawdamned if I know, Mike." Then he would shake his head and murmur, "And these are damn good dogs."

What happens to the scent so suddenly, I don't know either. When a dog has been on about twenty cougar kills, you learn it can be trusted to find the cougar, *if* there is one around. But I have heard many expert cougar hunters (they used to be a breed in the Northwest, where the cougar bounty made hunting profitable) say that nothing even in their experience explains the loss of scent by well-trained dogs. Score one in favor of the wily mountain lion.

The first cougar I killed was taken after many such experiences. When the dogs began to sing out, I didn't know what to expect. We were in dense, second-growth fir and hemlock, through which it was a terrific effort even to push our way. The bellowing of the dogs was like an organ gone wild in the woods. The weather was wet and sleet was driving into the trees like

an icy knife, but despite the cold, I had sweat running into my eyes after five minutes, as I made a desperate effort to keep up with the distant baying. I'd lost Jim in his first three bounds, and, frankly, I didn't like the closeness of the bush, because I didn't know what to expect from a chased cougar. I plunged on in the direction of the sound for about half an hour, finally coming upon one of the hounds at the foot of a mossy hemlock tree. When Jim came up at the same time from the other side, we saw a six-month-old kitten treed in a high branch. It came down to my .350 Winchester Autoloader, then the dogs started out again without warning on another hunt.

I looked at Jim. He looked puzzled.

"A bad cat, Mike," he said. "There's a honey-colored cat around here with a small knot-head that's plenty mean. The fact that she left her kitten makes me think she's a bad one. You never know what they are going to do. Sometimes they won't tree but will kill the dogs. Sometimes they'll come out of a tree after a few minutes. She may be right *there* in the bush watching us." He pointed to the thick growth five feet away. "Dirty stinking things! You never know what a cat will do. Let's go."

We began to follow the baying of the hounds, but almost as soon as we got on the trail the howls became the short, sharp barks of a pack with something up a tree. Together, we pushed our way through the jungle-like tangle of green growth until we hit the edge of a canyon. Sliding, clambering along the loamy, moss-covered banks, we came suddenly upon the female cougar about fifteen feet up in a dank hemlock. She was fidgeting on the first heavy branch, flicking her tail about like a whip and snarling balefully at the hounds. When she heard the sound of our approach, she snapped her angry, undersized head around, snarled, and climbed to the next branch. There she stopped, turning her yellow eyes upon us.

"I'd like a picture, Jim," I said between pants.

"Get it, then," he said, tight-lipped. "She's a honey-colored bitch, like I thought. And she looks as if she might come out anytime. I'll take a bead on her head. If she moves, watch out. She's fidgety."

I uncovered my camera and moved towards the tree. She drew her lips back in a snarl, lifted her front foot, and twisted her body to get a good look at me. I moved in to the base of the tree, where I saw I couldn't get a picture of her, then moved out to the side to get some light on the subject. I don't know why, but I didn't have any fear of her then. I had got one snap of her when I heard Jim say something.

"What did you say?" I asked.

"Watch her if she moves!" he gritted. "She may come out, judging by the way she is acting."

"Pshaw, you can hit her, can't you," I needed.

Jim didn't say anything but the look on his face was tense with expectancy. I moved around the tree to get a better view in the camera, because the light was in the back of her. She was about fifteen feet or less away, inasmuch as the bank rose up between the tree and the spot where I stood. The cougar snarled and lifted her head. I got my snap, and just as the shutter clicked, she lifted her foot. Then the thunderous crash of Jim's rifle smashed all other sounds. I jumped involuntarily as the cougar lunged from the branch almost at my feet. No one could have moved more cat-like or faster than Jim as he jumped to the fallen cat as it struggled to its feet. He put two shots into the head and body before even the two hounds could dash in. As the dogs bit at the belly and kicking feet, Jim stood over it with a savage look on his face. Then I realized why he had accounted for so many mountain lions. There was no doubt that he hated them, and I guess the good dogs he had lost to them provided at least one of the reasons.

I wanted more pictures of the animal, so I put it on my shoulders and struggled out of the thick growth. I'd say she didn't weigh more than 120 pounds and was about seven feet, six inches from tip of nose to tip of tail, but when I skinned her out and saw the bulging, short-coupled wrists and biceps, there was no doubt in my mind about how easily, with those stringy muscles, she could break the neck of a big buck with one smash of a paw. The carcass looked like a short, lithe, handsomely muscled athlete, stripped for action. It was only at this point that

I suddenly had a crawling feeling in my belly, as I realized that I had been taking pictures of the live beast within fifteen feet. Although the meat is fat and blonde in color, I have never made up my mind to eat any, despite being told that it is very much like young veal in taste.

Cliff Brown used to hunt cougars with a single-shot Winchester .22 rifle, because war regulations shut out the use of a heavier gun. He killed many a mountain lion with one shot in the head. He also lost a wounded one and had several of his dogs injured, I'm told. Shooting a cougar, when treed, is not, however, one of the most difficult things in the world. Cougars will tree often at ten feet up, and usually, when a man comes up, the dogs are yapping and jumping at it with wild fury. If hard pressed or nervous, the animal will climb up the tree with a bounding motion, much like an alley cat going up a telephone pole. When it feels it is out of reach, it will pick a couple of heavy bows and stand close to the trunk, watching every movement around it with a slight twitching of the tail, and the occasional half snarl, again like a tomcat angrily watching a terrier dog. At such a time it is a relatively easy to pick a clear shot at the flat head. The bone structure of the skull is not much, if any, heavier than that of a deer or a man. A .22 long-rifle slug will have sufficient penetration to smash into the brain. Although there should be little reason for shooting a treed cougar in the heart or lungs, still if a hunter feels insecure in a head shot, I would advise a rifle at least up to the ballistics of a .30-30 Winchester. The shot is usually at from six to sixty feet. Here, clearly, the nervousness of the rifleman can be the only excuse for missing a one-shot kill.

Although a cougar can rip a dog wide open from front to back with one slash of its claws, many dogs die instead in the jaws of the animal. The mouth, like that of a domestic cat, opens to immense proportions, and will accommodate a hound's entire head. One bite is usually enough.

The best time to hunt cougars is just after a fresh snow, when the track is as clear to the hunter as the scent is to the dogs. Just after or during a rain is next best, because the moisture works into the recesses of the claws and washes out the carrion



of the cougar's kills. This matter, deposited on the ground, leaves the hounds a good scent to follow, and it stays fresh for some length of time. Dry weather is, of course, poorest for hunting purposes, particularly when the country is barren or rocky.

After a fresh snow, even the poorest dogs and hunters have a good chance, and it is a joke among good hunters that men who wait until the snow are afraid that their dogs will go after raccoons or deer instead of cougars. Although it is a joke, it is also the truth. It takes untold patience to keep even a specially bred cougar dog, like the Lee Brothers' cougar hounds, from chasing raccoons and deer. The usual method is to bring the young dogs along with a lead dog, or experienced pack. Vicious as it may seem, many cougar hunters train their dogs with the common house cat, which has the same habits and something of the scent of the cougar. Training usually starts at the puppy stage, when the young hound is taught to chase stray or other unwanted cats up trees. Many cougar hunters stew up the remains of bobcat or cougar and feed the dogs with it, thus increasing their appetites for the kill. In the case of deer or raccoon chasing, the hound is whipped severely for the tendency, and sometimes the skin of either animal, or both, is placed where the pup or dog will be inclined to go near it. If it touches the skin, a whipping turns it from its natural tendencies. Venison scraps, particularly, should never be fed dogs, for they soon develop a taste for it. If a potential cougar hound doesn't soon respond to the idea of pursuing cougars, the hunter may as well get rid of the dog, or be satisfied to keep it as a pet.

Many types of dogs are used, but the hound, because of its size, nose, and particularly its sonorous voice, is the most used. The Lee Brothers have been breeding a dog for many years that looks like a cross between a smooth-haired pointer and a bloodhound. These dogs range from thirty to seventy pounds, as I recall them, and are anything in color from patched brown and white to pure black and tan, with even a bluish spotted type that is often called "Kentucky bluetick." The best dog I can recall on a cougar trail was a little Lee hound named "Dot," who was about the size of a small Labrador bitch, white and black

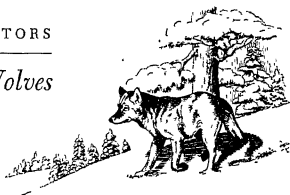
speckled, standing about eighteen inches at the front shoulder. Airdales, wolfhounds, collies, pointers, bloodhounds, and many indistinguishable mongrels are also used, and every cougar hunter I have ever seen swears that his dog is the "best dang dog that ever treed a cat."

Probably British Columbia is the best, although not the last, real stronghold of the mountain lion. The reason may be that the deer population there is more nearly normal than anywhere else in North America. Cougars will not be found where there is little or no game of the browsing type, since they are voracious feeders, killing an average of one deer a week. They will prey on livestock, and there are many cases of record in which they have killed small dogs of the spaniel breeds. A strange reversal of fate sometimes occurs when spaniels and terriers tree cougars until a hunter can make a kill. For what it is worth, my opinion is that the wolf is a dog, with a bark and a scent similar to those of a dog. From its experiences with wolf packs, the cougar knows it is safe from danger in a tree, hence it takes to the branches, where it will have little effort to expend.

The sonorous peals of a good hound's voice echoing through the tall timber or on the mountain tops provide an excitement for the hunter of predators that will lure him away from a warm bed and the comforts of home. Once a man tries for cougars, he is usually bound to try again. The history of the chase, using dogs, is older than history itself. It seems to prove nothing so much as the fact that some men and some dogs are just naturally inclined to chase things—cougars in particular. Come to think of it, it's sort of in my blood, too!

PREDATORS

23 : *Wolves*



THE big dog of the woods, the timber wolf, gray wolf, or buffalo wolf, is without doubt a vicious predator. There are many variations in the single species of *Canis nubilus*, and naturalists argue about proper identification of subspecies just as avidly as sportsmen do. I have seen at least three true wolves that looked as different as collie from German shepherd, and chow from Malamute. I firmly believe that variations in color and other differences are due in considerable part to climate, habitat, and the relative abundance or scarcity of food. The wolves I have seen ranged in color from almost black with a grizzly undercoat, through golden tawny, to almost pure white with a gray overtone. The animals varied in weight from about 50 to as much as 175 pounds. One skin I measured was over seven feet from nose to tail tip, and it was this animal that a trapper friend estimated at 175 pounds. The jaws of this monster measured ten inches, and the length of the head was almost seventeen inches. The bicuspids were over an inch in jaw length and half an inch wide, and the canine teeth were over one and a half inches in length. That wolf's mouth could have taken the head of a collie or setter and still left room to chew. The skin was almost black. A member of the Game Department identified it as a "Siberian black wolf," a breed said to have worked its way in some numbers across from Asia to Alaska. There was no doubt it was a wolf, a mean merciless killer, able to handle a big

black bear without trouble, definitely liable to tear a cougar to ribbons, and no doubt it had been a voracious feeder on the blacktail deer.

It is hard to advise a man to kill any animal mercilessly, and to kill until every last member of the species is eradicated. But it would be easier to advise this course of action for the wolf than to accomplish it. The wolf, a canine of high intelligence like the domestic dog, has pitted its brains against the best trappers and professional predator hunters in the business. Despite marked successes by the latter, the timber or gray wolf is recognized to be on the increase. My advice is to shoot every wolf you can get your sights on, for there will be a dozen others you will never see. Next to the cougar, the timber wolf is the animal least often met with by the hunter. Only in long stretches of open country is the sight of a wolf usually possible. In timber it is almost never seen. If it sees you, which is likely, it will head for the nearest cover at a long-limbed gallop. Yet it was not always that way. George Frederick Ruxton states in his hundred-year-old journal that when he wakened one night in the wilderness, he found a wild buffalo wolf dozing beside the warmth of his camp fire. Many old hunters tell of the times when packs of wolves chased game herds along with them on their horses.

I remember that, when I was a boy on the Canadian prairies, a heart-rending letter was received from my uncle in Saskatchewan. He had a lovely Scottish collie of which he and my aunt were very fond. During the bitter winters, the timber wolves roamed about the farm lands in search of any domestic animals they could take. It was my uncle's habit to let the collie dog into the house overnight during the winter, instead of bedding him down in the barn with the cattle. One night he forgot the dog, a good sized animal. In the morning they found a tiny yellow tuft of hair on the snow, and a minimum of blood stain. That was the last of the collie. True stories like that seem to breed a natural distrust and hate of the big wild dogs.

Many stories of wolves killing and eating people have been written as statements of fact, and some as obvious fiction. A Canadian newspaper has for many years offered one hundred

dollars for an authentic story of a man attacked by a wolf. The sum has never been claimed. But there may be a reason. Wolves, when ravenous, will eat cloth, hair, bones, and leather, and their big teeth will crack the haunch bones of a moose as if they were bonbons. If they did close in and kill a man, there would be no evidence of the affray but the memory, and the wolves themselves would have even that. They will eat human remains. That has definitely been established by the evidence of partly-devoured corpses surrounded by wolf tracks. Did they kill, or merely finish, the failing man? You be the judge. I'll tell you an authenticated story, sustained by Ray Petersen, who took five loggers to the spot where he had his adventure and showed them the mingling of wolf prints with his own. The men were all convinced of the truth of Ray's story.

Petersen went up the Tamarack River near Sullivan Bay, British Columbia, to try his luck at steelhead fishing. On the way upstream, the river shallowed and he had to leave his boat at the foot of a fifteen-foot claybank. He clambered up the bank and went on up the stream fishing. After he had hooked and lost two steelhead trout, he decided the traveling was too tough. He was about a quarter of a mile from his boat, with only his fishing rod as a doubtful means of protection, when he saw a big yellowish timber wolf come out of the bush just down his back trail. Not worried about the animal, he kept on his way. Arriving at the point where he had seen it first, Ray now saw the big yellow timber wolf coming out toward him, and behind it were a big black wolf and a smaller gray one. The big yellow wolf snarled, sending ice chills up and down his spine.

Deciding that the only way out of the situation was the frontal assault, he moved forward. As the wolves backed off, he noticed there were now five of them. He kept his back turned to the river, walking crabwise. The wolves came slowly after him, getting closer all the time, the big yellow one in the lead. When the leader got within ten feet of him, he could stand it no longer. He slapped at his nose with the tip of his fishing rod. The wolf stopped short, and so did the others. But they soon spread out in a circle, cutting off Ray's retreat.

Alternately, they jumped back as they were hit with the rod tip, snarling and snapping teeth that seemed to him to be six inches long. For fully half an hour, they changed places, circling him to the bank, with the big yellow animal coming as close as six feet. He kept his back to the claybank, prayed fervently, and continued edging along.

As his boat hove into view around the last bend, he almost decided to jump off the bank into the water, because the wolves seemed to have sensed his possible escape from them and had become even bolder. His decision to stay on the bank probably saved his life, for, as he reached the proximity of the boat and slid backwards down the bank, the big yellow wolf made a lunge. Ray hit it on the nose with the butt of his rod. It backed off, snarling to the rest of the pack.

He turned quickly and pushed the boat into the rising tide, which fortunately had lifted the hull clear of the sand. As he did, the wolves all came down the bank at him, hitting the water like a combat force around the small boat, snapping at the oar he had taken up. When he poled away, they sat and howled on the beach in frustration and anger. When he rejoined other loggers with whom he worked, they took rifles and went to the spot. Needless to say, the wolves did not show themselves, but the big prints among his own in the mud and bank loam were enough to verify his story.

Such is the nature of the big wolf, a pack hunting, ghost-devil of the timber. He is courageous or a coward, whichever way you see it, but a mean, merciless killer when he knows the advantage is his.

It is difficult to tell anyone how to hunt a wolf, because no one knows just how a wolf will act. However, a predator hunter whom I know uses the following trick to take them occasionally. When he is in new country in which he intends to stay for a few days, and there is evidence of wolves around, he cuts a wooden stake. He takes the stake out into an area clear of trees for a couple of hundred yards and drives it into the ground, usually at a point which he has to pass daily. Each time he passes it, he goes up to the stake and urinates against it. After about a

week the wolves, who are as curious by nature as most wild animals are, will begin approaching the stake and sniffing at it. They will react the same as a dog, sprinkling it with their mark. When they have become used to doing this, he will set traps at the base of the stake. The result is usually a trapped wolf.

He has spent most of his life in the timber and says that he has seen the wolves actually in the act. Also, he will sometimes sit out the day downwind of the stake and kill the curious wolf with a well-aimed shot. He is a man of infinite patience and absolute sincerity. I remember twice having seen him pull his hounds off the trail of a cougar we were after. I asked him why? The first time he did not answer. The second time I saw his lead dog pittle against a tree after a good investigative sniff. At the time we were in wild country, away from all habitation. Since the other cougar dog was a bitch, I put two and two together and arrived at a solution. The lead hound had sniffed at a tree a wolf had used. When Jim pulled the hounds off a few minutes later, I asked him outright if he was afraid of wolves. He answered that he was afraid for the dogs with wolves around, and that the sniffing and urinating of his male hound at the tree which I had noticed was enough evidence for him.

Poison in many forms is set out, often in the carcasses of farm cattle or game animals. On the level plateaus of the United States and the prairies of Canada, wolves are sometimes hunted by running them down with horses and automobiles, in company with large wolf hounds. No ordinary dog is a match for the vicious creatures, and when the large hound dogs have tired the wolf enough, it is shot as it stands at bay.

For the sportsman hunter, tracking and hunting wolves is an almost fruitless pastime. The animal, because it is a dog, is not considered game. The bloody, canine smelling carcass leaves a man with only a feeling of successful retribution coupled with revulsion. Many wolves have been shot by hunters in unexpected encounters, as each pursued other or the same game. The best advice I can give is that, when you see what appears to be a big Alsatian dog in country where domestic animals are not likely to be, shoot quickly! If it is a dog that has been rang-

ing the game areas, it is in all probability chasing game, and should be killed anyway.

I made the mistake of letting a big wolf go once. Sitting beside a little valley in the early morning, waiting for the "prrrt prrrt" of a bunch of grouse which I knew to be around, I was startled to see a big grayish-colored "collie" drift down the bank of the creek on the other side from where I sat. I watched it for a moment, then realized that the low-hung head and semi-crouched shoulders were not normal in a domestic dog. When it was about twenty-five yards away I hesitantly identified it as a timber wolf. Still unsure, I held my fire but raised my gun in readiness. The movement of the barrel was sufficient to make that animal take a big leap sideways that put him into bushy undergrowth. Needless to say, I never saw him again.

I shot a big gray wolf after much the same kind of approach. Closing in on a big buck which I had tracked for a couple of hours, I happened to look back on my trail. Just where I had left the timber, the wolf slunk out into the open. I looked forward at the freshening tracks of the buck, then back at the wolf. It occurred to me that he might be the forerunner of a pack that was after the same deer I was. I didn't know whether I was going to get the buck, but I did know the wolves could, since the snow was crusty and full of deep drifts. Moreover, the wolf presented a target I knew I could hit, and he hadn't seen me because he was sniffing at my, or the deer's tracks. I swung quickly. As his head came up, I slugged him from a distance of one hundred yards, right in the chest with a .32-20 bullet. He stopped where he was, like a good wolf—a dead one.

The wolf pelt is a beautiful thing when in good condition; sometimes it is large enough for a rug. But a wolf usually looks so much like a domestic dog that few men bother with their pelts, except for bounty purposes. They are not trophies in the real sense of the word.

Any rifle above a rim-fire .22 caliber will put a wolf down for keeps, and even the .22 long rifle will nail them with a head or heart shot. However, it won't any more than sting them, or make them sick, if poorly placed. Not even a wolf deserves such treat-



ment. The Hornet, among the .22's, is a little dandy for this kind of shooting, but it had better be carried for other purposes too, because the wolf is ubiquitous but seldom seen.



## PREDATORS

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### 24 : *Other Predators*

THERE are many predators that shorten the life term of game and reduce the sportsman's chances before he gets into the fields or mountains, and they prey without barrier of season, continuously, upon fishes, birds, and animals alike. To mention a few, there are foxes, weasels, rodents, crows, mergansers, ravens, hawks, owls, herons, magpies, and lynxes, or wildcats. They kill and devour almost daily, and in some cases many times daily and wastefully. The sportsman, with some exceptions, kills and takes only enough for himself during a short, well-regulated season. There are people who would protect all bird, fish, and animal life from man's harm, swearing that nature will keep the balance, and God, not man, is the only ordained power to judge life and death. Be that as it may, man too is an instrument of nature, and he is a wiser killer than a predator. If he takes game, he should also protect it, and he does and will take game.

#### CROWS

Crows are known to take eggs from the nests of songbirds and game species, and they also attack the young. The bird nevertheless inspires admiration for its wary wisdom in eluding the efforts of man, and it is known to "sentence" its own kind. I have actually seen a bunch of crows on a pulp-mill roof go into a noisy palaver of kangaroo justice, then set upon a fellow crow,

standing apart, and literally tear him to pieces. The imaginative have written this off as a trial and execution for felony, a court of highest jurisdiction and the shell game, with some poor guy losing his life over it. I have never heard the same wisdom propounded about a silly bunch of chickens who will suddenly set upon one of their flock and kill it. The evidence at close hand, in the case of chickens, has sometimes proved that the hen was suffering from a malformation of body or comb, and that the flock's blood-lust from sight and smell was aroused into insensate fury. Perhaps it is the same with crows. They, too, are animals of a flock

I don't know whether crows were ever tamer or if they have developed their wariness to man since the arrival of the rifle, but I do remember that I have cursed them a hundred times for their superior intelligence when I have eased out of a car with a rifle or shotgun. They will definitely fly near an unarmed man, and definitely avoid one with a gun. There is no doubt about it. There are, however, ways of bagging them

The stuffed-owl method is an old trick, and it is very effective. The idea being to acquire somehow a stuffed bird, place it within shooting distance of good cover, and sluice the birds with a shotgun as they come in to attack the owl. Aside from predator control, this method results in good practice shooting. I have heard men say they got the same results by placing a decoy in the form and color of an owl on a post or the limb of a tree near a known rookery. The owl is the sworn enemy of crows, and he flies in the night when the crows cannot, because they are resting in clusters in the branches of their rookeries. It is not any wonder that the sight of an owl would arouse them to frenzy. Give the crow credit. It will fly in to attack a bird twice its size without thought of its own safety.

One day, while crossing a ravine, I looked up at the sound of furious cawing. To my amazement I saw two crows dive-bombing a golden eagle. The eagle was swerving, swooping, losing altitude, in nettled silence. Every once in a while, he would flip right over on his back, lash out with his talons at the incoming bird, somersault back into normal flight, only to be

attacked at the back of the neck by the pursuing crow. The aerial battle started at about six hundred feet altitude and was a most marvelous sight to watch. The crows drove the big bird right down into the timber, then, after a few brawling caws, they headed for the direction in which they had come. The eagle didn't get up while I watched, but he may have flown away among the tall timber.

This known attacking of owls and other predators by crows may, or may not, end in death to the former, but it places the crow among the more estimable birds from the point of view of courage. I witnessed two crows' daily worrying of a dog almost into starvation in the city. One crow would actually light on the dog's rear end while he fed from his dish, then fly away, almost on the ground, while the dog chased him. The other crow would hop on the bowl edge and devour as much food as he could get into himself until the dog came back. Then he would decoy the dog away while the other crow filled his craw unmolested.

Crows will kill their own kind if the latter are wounded or caught in a trap. The Indians in the Northwest, from whom the white man can always learn, put that particular knowledge to practice. There was a four-cent bounty on crows in effect at the time that I recall this procedure. The Indians would somehow manage to trap or shoot a crow and still keep it alive. They would then turn it on its back on top of a stump and secure it down. The "avenging" crows, or "rescuers," would come to the cawing of the imprisoned crow. As they flew in to attack it, the crow secured to the stump would take a death-like grip on the incoming crow and hold it down. The Indians would grab the incoming crow and tie it on its back on another stump. When they had several decoys out, they would take and kill the other crows as they came in. Yes, it is true. Try it sometime.

Ravens or rooks, which are of the same family as the crow, are even more wary of man than the crow. They seldom if ever flock, but pair up much like other birds. They are scavengers and killers. I know one woodsman who swears he has seen young fawns killed by them. He told me that he once came upon two

ravens which had just discovered a newly-born fawn where its mother had left it. He heard the commotion in the bush and came up to find the big birds had torn the eyes from the sockets of the staggering young fawn. He had to kill the animal, but he also shot every raven that came within reach of his rifle after that. The fact that the raven reaches a length of twenty-seven inches will explain the ease with which this bird could kill many of the smaller game animals. The only use I have seen for the raven is to mark a game-kill you have lost. Like buzzards, they find a killed animal in a matter of minutes. I frankly dislike them, and will shoot them on sight if they give me that chance. They have a very beautiful bell-like note in their repertory which you would not recognize as coming from the same bird which usually gives only a coarse grunt or hoarse, deep-throated call. If anything gives them a reason to exist, I'd put that down as it.

#### OWLS AND HAWKS

Some hawks and owls are definitely helpful to the farmer, and for that reason should be left alone. This tome is too short to identify the good ones, but any game department will let you know which are considered harmful in its district. I shoot all goshawks that I see, but seldom bother an owl, because I am not sufficiently able to tell them apart, and also because I seldom see an owl. The goshawk is a grouse and pheasant killer of vicious proportions, with an appetite for flesh comparable to that of a sea gull for flotsam. It is a swift blue-gray bird with a soaring, diving flight, easy to identify from the almost harmless red-tailed hawk.

With hawks, I have found there is a time in flight when they are vulnerable, and if you are quick, it is actually easy to hit one in flight with a rifle. A hawk will drift over large areas in search of the movements of game. It sees you hundreds of yards before you see it, if indeed you see it at all. A hawk approaches in a long coast down the air currents toward you, then circles slowly in every-decreasing spirals until it hovers directly overhead. For just a second, it will remain absolutely still, wings beating fast,

then, if satisfied with identification of the movement below, it will soar off on a further quest. If you see a hawk approaching, and stop under cover, you will soon see it hover until it can identify some part of you. At this momentary halt in the air, if you have been following the bird with the rifle, you can squeeze the trigger on what amounts to a stationary target. It is no feat of marksmanship at all to knock down a hawk this way.

#### MERGANSERS AND HERONS

Both of these birds are usually protected by law, since in many quarters it is considered a crime to shoot them. In the period before the protection was afforded them, it was my pleasure to kill "fish ducks," or mergansers, but not herons. Although I once counted twenty or thirty ten- to twelve-inch trout which a blue heron had killed with a stab in the back of the neck with its dagger-like beak, I still did not kill the bird. Herons are not numerous, and they are beautiful. I don't think they would, by themselves, ever become a menace to game-fish propagation. Thinking of those good-sized trout, I at first thought of the heron as a wasteful and prolific killer, but I later realized that the bird had merely killed any fish that came near it with the powerful down-drive of its beak. Those too large to be swallowed had to be left, but the bird wasn't actively seeking out and destroying fish.

The mergansers do seek out and destroy fish, not by tens and twenties, but by the thousands. They are able to swim underwater like a fish, several of them working the small fingerlings into a pocket and swallowing them by the dozens in a day. Mergansers have families of up to fifteen ducklings, and they will clean out one stream or small lake of fry, then move onto the next. Because they are quick in the water and feed ravenously on the fingerling fish, I'd take every last bird in commonly fished waters I could lay my hands on. If they have to exist for beauty's sake alone, it might be worthwhile to let them exist where man doesn't have to stock fish for sport. There is little danger of the merganser's extermination, and it is certainly no adjunct to a fisherman's paradise.

## RODENTS AND WEASELS

Some of the following are classed as small game, some as vermin, some as predators, some as fur bearers, some are protected by law and others sought as predators. These animals all do harm to game or farmers' crops, some to both - rats, squirrels, gophers, woodchucks, weasels, mink, marten, wolverine.

The common rat is known to everyone, and a good dog will put rats out of stacked grain, loose hay, or a barn sufficiently fast to warrant shooting practice. The rat is responsible for more damage to world produce than any of the other, or perhaps all other, animals. Kill it without any hesitation whenever you see it. It is fond of game birds' eggs and young fledglings.

The woodchuck is a crop feeder and most farmers will gladly allow a dependable huntsman to shoot at will on their property. The habit of the chuck of sitting upright on the ground after leaving cover, or when listening for movement, makes it a good stationary target for scope- or iron-sight exercises. It becomes cagey with steady hunting, and is excellent for training the hunter's eyes in discovering game and also in silent stalking. Gopher shooting belongs in the same category.

Squirrels are both fur and game animals of excellent quality, and in some areas have definite seasons and regulations protecting them. I have shot them a number of times for meat, and have found the latter of fine quality. The meat is similar to that of rabbit in texture, but because they live mostly on seeds and nuts, with an occasional bird egg for a change, it is much richer and appetizing. Actually, squirrels are not predators in the proper sense, and I now leave them strictly alone. However, for the man who is interested in meat as well as improving his ability on running targets, the squirrel scampering about the trees offers a fast, hard-to-hit objective. I don't think much of shooting them while they are sitting, because they are often still for minutes at a time, but it takes a good rifleman to hit a running or climbing squirrel.

It is hard to judge the weasels as either a bad influence or a good one. They kill rats by the dozens, and they also kill game birds, rabbits, and domestic fowl. They are nowhere a menace.

## BOOK I : *Hunting*

to the game population, and could probably, therefore, be put down as regulators rather than destroyers. I used to kill weasels many years ago, with the thought that I was doing good, particularly after coming upon a couple of rabbits that had been drained dry of blood, the livers eaten, and the carcasses left. Frankly, I don't think weasels kill one game animal in twenty, the remainder representing the take of coyotes and bobcats. In some areas they are protected by law as fur bearers. My advice, for what it is worth, is to leave them alone, as they are certainly not pests.

### FOXES

The fox in all of his varieties, from the common red kind known over much of North America to the handsome Arctic white specimen, is one of the principal predators of our continent and a classic creature for cunning, wit, and proven ability to evade man and all of his stratagems. He has provided huntsmen (the mounted kind in red coats, with a riding style described by Joe Mathews as resembling colored sacks of wheat jouncing over hill and dale)—he has provided huntsmen with more exercise than they need. In Tennessee and Virginia, the Carolinas, too, he has given many a patient farm lad some extra income from the sale of his pelt, which, needless to say, was dearly won. The fox is an admirable creature and a dainty and efficient killer of all manner of small game, domestic fowl, and upland game birds. I can't get excited about representing him as a predator worthy of pursuit with a gun. He is too seldom seen for that. Let's put it this way: he is part of the ecological balance. I'd leave him alone, even when, as a latecomer to certain areas (Oklahoma is a splendid example), he plays hob temporarily with unwary species. The animals and birds he preys upon will be better specimens for the life-and-death competition he supplies.

### BOBCAT, LYNX, WILDCAT

The bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) and lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) are felines



of smaller size than the cougar, but what they lack in size they make up in ferocity. The Canada lynx, with tufted ears, is larger than the bobcats. Like the cougar family, they will take almost any of our game animals, but it is very doubtful if they take any other than the young of such large animals as mule deer, elk, moose, and caribou. Their habit is to hunt singly, not in bands, and thus they just don't pack enough individual weight to destroy the larger animals. I have heard of isolated cases of a small whitetail deer falling to a lynx, but I do not believe this is common. I have actually found much evidence of the taking of grouse and rabbits, such as the long pounce of their pug marks spread several feet apart in the snow, and a pile of feathers or scuffed pieces of fur. Only once, in the Rocky Mountains, have I seen a live Canada lynx in all my time spent in the woods.

The big bobtailed cat was slinking along a rocky ledge, up-trail from where I was sitting behind a pine tree. It spooked out as soon as my face turned to it. I ran up with my rifle ready, only to find it had disappeared as silently as a wraith in the sparse timber, without sound or apparent movement. As I walked slowly along the game trail, two ptarmigan shot out from a spot not twenty feet from where the cat had been. No doubt I had spoiled his dinner plans.

In Arizona, Colorado, in fact, in practically all midwestern and western states, and in some of the Canadian provinces, the wildcat, or bobcat, and lynx are hunted by big-game hunters with dogs. The hunting of them is no different in most respects from cougar hunting, but without the immediate danger to the dogs. Although a big lynx will sometimes maul a hound, it will almost always tree or go into a den for protection. These smaller cats are nocturnal in habit to some extent, and the use of a good hound, or pack is the only satisfactory way to hunt them.

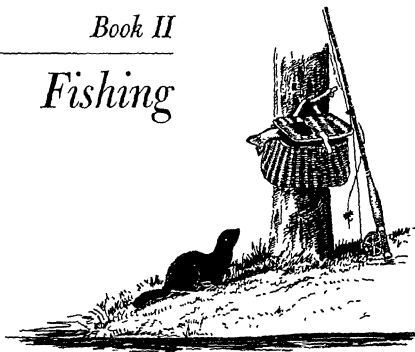
Any rifle will break down the bone structure of the lynx or bobcat, but as with the cougar, the head shot is the best killer and least likely to give trouble to the hound pack.



*Book II*

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*Fishing*





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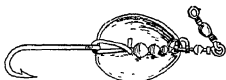
## *Fishing Tackle and Methods*

SINCE MAN first spliced two hard pieces of bone together, spun himself a fiber line, and discarded his primeval spear, more lures, snares, and methods of enticing and catching fish have been invented than is the case in any other sport. Every time I look in a sporting goods store, I break out in a rash of envy and desire. I'm a sucker for anything that looks slightly different from anything else, and as if that weren't enough, I'm even guilty of inventing and manufacturing some of the cock-eyedest fish lures known to the business. The very strange thing about all the others, as well as my own lures, is that they will, without exception, take fish. I have seen some lures that were better than others, but I have yet to find a lure that won't attract some member of the finny tribe, even my own Mike-Fin Illusion.

As a matter of fact, I have a strange-looking lure that I came by ten years ago, the like of which was not seen before or since. It has a rather sloppily-made weight on the shank, to avoid having to put a sinker on the line. It has a one-paddle propeller, so arranged and designed that only a mechanical engineer would know it will spin. It is held together with two screws, one for changing the hook, the other for removing the bucktail skirt, which protects the hook among weeds but can be removed for clean water. It has, to date, caught cut-throat trout, salmon, steelhead, lake bass, needlefish, barracuda, pike, tommy cod, Eastern brook trout, Dolly Varden, black sea bass, and possibly

other fish I can't remember. I use it when I am desperate for a strike, and often it works. I have tried it for hours at a time, then switched to a more commonplace lure, and had immediate results. I have lost hundreds of new lures, and yet never this silly one. It has had at least six new hooks replacing old or broken ones, and I hope to use it until I die.

There are many standard lures that will take fish the world over, one of them being the Colorado Silver Spinner. I recall taking a Colorado Silver No. 3 from my tackle box while fishing off Vera Cruz, Mexico. I had been using the lures advised by the Mexicans for barracuda, snook, tarpon, and needlefish, with desultory results. I looked at the Colorado, remembering the luck which had attended its use in British Columbia, California, and Idaho on steelhead and Kamloops trout. I put it on the line, with a cutting of pompano on the hook. The first cast hit a barracuda, which I landed after a good battle. My second cast into the surf took a three-foot needlefish. I hooked, landed, and lost a total of twelve barracuda and needlefish in the course of two hours on that *trout* lure. Called by other names in other localities, the general appearance of this common lure is shown below. I strongly advise it for all types of cast fishing in all waters.



Of course, fly fishing is a particular field of its own. There are scores of flies that will take fish under certain conditions, but there are six or seven standard patterns that are used with variations. A wet fly is designed to sink just after the cast, while a dry fly is supposed to sit on the top of the water and appear like an insect that has just alighted. The fluffy hackle of the dry fly is used for that purpose, while the thin body and tight build of a wet fly is to make it sink. The colors in my opinion are more for the fisherman than the fish, because fish are conceded to be color blind. With the exception of red, white, black, and irides-

cence, it is not logical that a fish can tell the variations of color. White is not a color, but a reflector of light, black is not a color either, but a shadow or absorber of light. Iridescence, which is common on the heads of drake mallards or the tail feathers and other feathers of a peacock, is, of course, a reflector of light. Red is a color, but it is at the end of the spectrum, a danger sign in nature, meaning blood. As fish are invariably attracted to blood, it seems logical that some shade or refraction in red-hued lures is recognizable to the fish. All other colors, it would seem to me, would only emit light and shade. The form and movement of the offering are the things which the fish seem to recognize. For this reason I believe, and have found it true, that a well-shaped fly (that is, one that, when wet, has the shape of an insect) moved in simulation of a struggling insect or animal is the best lure or killer. The fact that a trout or bass will nose up to a dead lure and reject it, or will mouth a fast-taken lure and spit it out, seems to bear this fact out.

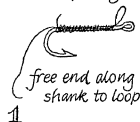
Fly-tying became an interest of mine many years back, at which time I made a study of the insects commonly found flying at different seasons. With some old wool, mallard feathers, Christmas tinsel, and cigarette package cellophane, I tried duplicating these insects as nearly as my fumbling fingers could do it. The lures resulting from my efforts were crude, but in every case they took fish as well as, and in many cases better than, those of experts who stated that only such-and-such a lure was the right one to be used. Such flies as the Royal Coachman, Parmachene Belle, Mickey Finn, Gray Mare, the Bucktails, Nymphs, Black Gnats, Black Widows, are all good standard flies, and a selection containing all of them will take fish *if the fish are striking*.

Fly-tying is a very simple art to learn. One needs only a clothes peg for a vise (although I recommend a good vise if the art is taken up seriously), a bunch of wool, silk thread, tinsel, and some old chicken and duck feathers. These items, together with a bottle of the wife's nail polish and a lot of patience, will produce results for anyone. The basic idea is to wrap the hook shank with thread from the eyelet to the bend of the shank, then

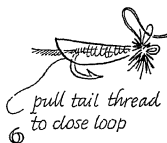
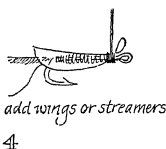
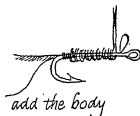
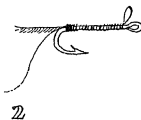
## BOOK II : *Fishing*

wrap the body around and secure it with the thread, then the wings or streamers and the hackle (if it has one), at which time the thread also secures them, and is wound in a ball, just below the eyelet, then cinched there with shellac or nail polish. Yes, that is all, tails, legs, tinsel being just additions to the base. Illustration appears below.

*leave loop at eyelet*



*tail added*



Bait-fishing is probably the least glamorous, but also without question the most effective, of fishing methods. In bait-fishing, the lure is a trap baited with a natural fish food. Offer a man wine with an indiscernible potion in it and he will take it in good faith. A fish is hardly less gullible. If you offer the bait with a barb sticking out of it, tied to a noticeable chunk of rope, the fish will naturally spurn it, as would a man offered a pellet in his drink. How the bait is placed on the hook is very important, as is true also of the leader, which attaches the hook to the line. Any good gut or nylon will serve for a leader, but a bait should always be cleverly put on the hook to conceal the unnatural metal. If you don't believe it, try throwing edible material to the fish, and watch how quickly they will sort it from a suspended lure.



## Tackle and Methods

It is surprising how few people actually know that there is a correct manner in which to thread a worm on a hook. Almost invariably the head of the worm is darker. It should be threaded on the hook from the head end, starting just behind the head in earth worms, and down the throat of a sea worm, taking extreme care to keep the barb from breaking the external skin until a good pleated bunch of the worm is on the hook, thus allowing the barb of the hook to break through, and at least a small chunk of the tail to hang off the end. No worm should be left on a line *after a chunk has been taken by a strike*, or if the worm has ceased to squirm and has become lifeless. Always clean the hook and put on a completely new worm. It will give six times better results. Too, I have found that big worms bring larger fish, so if the worm is not large, put two or three on the hook.

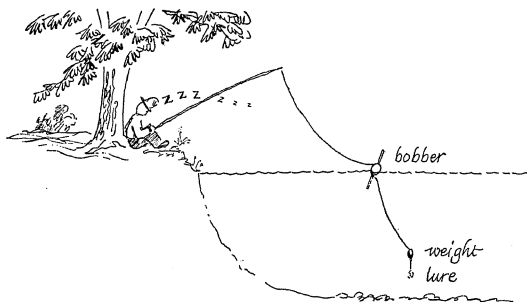
If the bait is a chunk of meat, always try to use a piece with a bit of skin on it, and shove the barb through the skin a couple of times to make it stay up the shank of the hook. If necessary, take a little time and tie the bait with fine thread, so that it will stay at the top of the shank. Illustrations are below.



The bobber or float is used by many anglers and the types are many, the colors a riot of hues. I have found that the less shiny, less colorful the float, the less chance that the fish will become alarmed. Again, the best type consists of those that will not slip down the line as soon as a fish begins to fight. Moving floats are difficult to use, but they will not stop the line from coming all the way to the reel and thus cause trouble. The placement of a bobber or float should be such that it will keep the lure or bait a foot or more above bottom. The float is used for many reasons, but chiefly to keep the bait above bottom and give the angler a sure indication of a bite or nibble. I have seen

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it used on every fish from catfish to steelhead trout. Arrangement of the float is illustrated below.



Probably the placement of float, line, sinker, leader and lure give more people cause for worry than any other basic problems in fishing. In spinning, fly casting, and trolling the sequence is the same as illustrated below.



Fig 1 *Spinner*

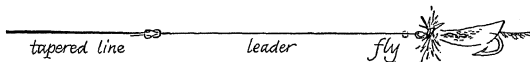


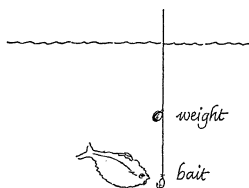
Fig 2 *Fly*



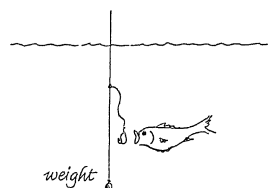
Fig 3 *Troll*

## *Tackle and Methods*

For bait- or still-fishing there are two arrangements, depending on whether the fish is a bottom feeder or a fish that normally feeds a few inches or feet above the floor of the stream or lake.

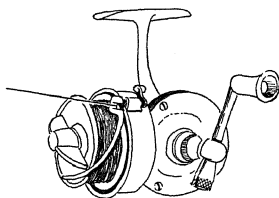


**Fig 1** *Bottom feeders*



**Fig 2** *Nonbottom feeders*

When a man graduates from a handline to a reel, he often wonders what to buy. There are only three main types, the fly reel, spinning type reel, and the comparatively new French invention the thread-line reel, as shown below.



*The fly reel* has variations in kind, but basically it is a drum with two handles on it, fitted in a receiver without benefit of geared mechanism, except in the automatic reel. The line required for a cast is reeled off and held in the hand in loops. When the cast is made the line slips easily from the finger tips, and is unhindered by the pull of the reel. The retrieve is made with direct winding on either of the handles, which balance the spin of the reel.

*The spinning and trolling reels* usually have a geared mechanism which speeds up the retrieve of the line. It is, again, a drum in a receiver, and is often equipped with a mechanism called a level wind, which runs back and forth on a ratchet, distributing the line evenly across the more extreme width of the axle. Because a heavy weight is used on the line, the thread is pulled off without effort from the geared drum. Some of these reels are equipped with a clutch, which allows the drum to spin, without the winder moving. I have one such reel, but find little advantage over the direct hook up of winder and drum. There are of course spinning and trolling reels built on the same principle as the fly reel. Many have less, or more, gadgets than the basic ones, but I find the simple geared spindle with a level-wind or a thread-line reel the best for my spinner casting.

The newest reel on this continent is *the thread-line reel*, which is based on the idea of a free-running thread sliding off one end of a spool. It will produce remarkable casts with a minimum of exertion and practice. It has a drum with an arm which is geared to a winder like that of the spinning reel, and as the drum rotates the arm picks up the thread and deposits it on the axle of the drum. I like this reel type because it limits the thickness of the line, which in turn limits the fisherman from mauling his fish ashore. With a thread line, you have to play the fish in. This isn't just a new gadget. I think it is here to stay as one of the new arts of fishing.

The proper rod for the proper reel, and vice versa, are problems dictated by the character of fishing intended by the fisherman. A trolling reel goes with a trolling rod, obviously; and you won't have much luck trying to throw plugs and other heavy lures on a fly rod, using a casting reel. A casting reel, equally, would make a good fly rod butt heavy and unwieldy. The relatively new art of spinning, made possible by the invention of the spinning reel, would be next to impossible with anything except a spinning rod-spinning reel combination.

The differences between these various rods consist in length, flexibility, and design for particular purposes. Thus, a fly rod is long, slender, and light, with a willowy flexibility. Its purpose is

to cast light lures—dry and wet flies, surface lures, and spinners, among others—rather considerable distances. Balance in a fly rod is of supreme importance. I am not going into weights more than to say that fly rods of six feet and greater length can weigh from four and one-half ounces up. The spinning rod, on the other hand, is designed for casting somewhat heavier lures, the reel is carried just above the casting hand, whereas in the fly rod the reel is below the hand, at the butt of the rod. In a spinning rod, which whips lures with great accuracy from a free-winding reel, which is practically backlash-proof, the emphasis is upon the tip. It should have great flexibility at this point, thus to toss the lure with greater power. A spinning rod is usually somewhat shorter than a fly rod, though not much. The casting rod proper is a short affair, carrying an anti-backlash reel forward of the casting hand, and is used for casting wooden or plastic plugs and other heavy lures, for bass, muskie, and other hard-striking game fish. The trolling rod, like its casting mate, is a heavier affair than the spinning and fly rods. It should have a willowy tip, and if made of bamboo, should have a steel core, to keep it from becoming set in any one direction.

This last-mentioned subject introduces the question of materials for rods. For many generations, split bamboo rods have been *de rigueur* among fishermen on all continents, but steel rods have been in use for more than twenty-five years, especially for trolling and casting, where great ruggedness or whip are desirable, and in the last five years, tubular and solid-glass rods in all departments have begun to challenge all other makes. When chemists said thirty years ago that plastics offered the most challenging department of research in the immediate future, they knew what they were talking about. The flexibility and strength of a glass rod are almost unbelievable. They can be produced in any desired weight, and, what is more important, they can be mass-produced. This was never true with split bamboo, a natural wood or fiber. Prices of these new glass productions consequently have gone progressively downwards, so that a suitable rod is available to almost any man or lad who wishes to fish. For the man who wishes something superlatively fine, the cost of an

excellent glass rod can be as great as that of a split-bamboo production of finest craftsmanship.

Lines, like rods and reels, are made to do specific tasks. I suppose I have used almost everything in this department, from steel, through cuttyhunk and nylon, to braided silk. For those who are doing more spinning than formerly, I may as well speak of spinning lines first. I like braided silk for spinner casting better than anything else, but I have used cuttyhunk and nylon with a certain amount of satisfaction. Silk stiffens when wet, and in a good cast will arch like a bridge to the fallen lure, remaining just that split second in the air during which the fish sees only the presumably unattached lure. None of the other lines will do that for me. Spinning lines should be highly abrasion resistant.

Braided nylon in casting lines is superb, for the reason that it is almost always wound on the reel wet. Nylon, as every woman knows, is almost unaffected by water, except as a cleansing agent, whereas natural fibers soon succumb to a combination of abrasion, damp rot, and general deterioration. The plugger and the troller have a choice of braided nylon, silk, and other fibers. The line is relatively fine—so fine in fact that one of my friends sometimes carries as much as nine hundred feet on a not too large casting reel for lake fishing for large species.

The fly line, really the classic line from Izaak Walton's time to our own, is, of course, different in many respects from all the rest. The fly line is so designed that the heavy part of the line is out toward the fly, thus giving the line the weight on the end where it is needed, in order to carry the rest of the line out with it. Actually, the principle is the same as using a weight, but the line is tapered to quite a thickness, reducing fairly quickly to the fine line of the backing or main line. Some of these lines have a double taper for greater effectiveness in casting, but I have heard too many men argue on the respective merits of single- and double-tapered lines to wish to be drawn into it, even as a judge. The same can be said of level fly lines as against single- or double-tapered ones. Some men swear by the level line, others merely at it. I have used both kinds for both kinds of fishing, dry and wet flies. About all I can say about the level line is that

it costs less, on average, and was used long before tapered lines were known. And these two types of fly lines can be had in both the sinkable and the nonsinkable varieties.

Weights, or sinkers, are made for a variety of methods of fishing, but all for the same purpose, namely to carry the lure or bait to a sufficient depth to put it, so to speak, on the dinner table of the fish. Split shot are the classic form of sinkers, used with a wide range of artificial lures. Simply lay the line or leader in the cleft in the shot, bite the cleft closed with the front teeth, and go about the business of catching fish. I wouldn't be without split shot (which come in a range of sizes) in my creel, tackle box, or kit. Other sinkers are made for bait fishing and run from the long affairs with spiral wire gadgets for attaching them to the line, through the kind that snap on with a swivel, to the big flat and the big belled kinds that are used for heaving a bait out two hundred feet or more in lake or surf fishing. I favor the bell weight with a swivel for casting, the double-ender with two eyelets for trolling, and the slip-weight, which slides down to the leader when a fish is hooked. We also used to tie old steel nuts on a line in such a manner that the thread tying it created a bow in the line. When the fish strikes, the thread breaks, and allows the nut to fall off, thus leaving the fish without a weight between him and the embattled fisherman. It is an excellent arrangement.

Swivels are as important on a moving line as a clutch is on a car. If a line is pulled through the water with a lure on it, the spinning of the lure will often twist the line, and you will have one of the worst tangles you ever saw in your life. In either spinning or trolling they are a *must*, and should be placed on the end of the leader closest to the line, regardless of whether there are six swivels before the juncture of the line and leader.

Hooks are the least disputed instruments of fishing. Actually, there are only three commonly used shapes, the single shank and barb, the double shank and barb, the treble shank and barb. I don't like the double type, but I have found that a treble hook is highly effective. A fish so hooked will usually give twice the battle. The smaller the fish, the smaller the hook. Knots for tying on hooks and the other paraphernalia of fishing are the subject

of a lot of inconsequential talk. One type of knot is advised by one fisherman, another by his opposition. Obviously the main thing in tying a piece of tackle is to be sure that it stays on. There are types of plastic leaders that slip the knot, or sever themselves if tied in certain ways. My advice: *don't buy* that type of line or leader. The simplest method that I have found of tying a knot, is, first, to tie a single loop knot in the line, insert it through the eyelet then tie a single loop knot around the shank of the eyelet. The first knot will not let the second knot come undone. Cut it off with a knife when finished with it. Leader is cheap, and you will lose only a quarter to half an inch of line at each change, which is a lot less expensive than the time you would spend, or lose, fiddling with some cock-eyed special knot.

The fly-fisherman looks down on the spinner fisherman, the spinner fisherman is derisive of the fly-fisherman, and both of them disdain the troll fisherman, which happy individual looks amusedly at the other two and just goes on catching fish, while all of them look down on the drop-line bait fisherman, who enjoys himself, oblivious that there are other ways of fishing or having more fun. In my opinion, too much is made of the relative merits of these various ways of catching fish. I use all of them as the situation permits, I am lousy at all of them and it costs me money to own the necessary equipment for all the different fishing methods. Perhaps there is something to the argument for sticking to one kind of fishing. But the most important thing is for the fisherman to fish where the fish are.

Far too many men will cast an evidently barren pool, as if they expected fish to grow in it for them. Needless to say, they don't catch fish, yet they wonder why. From some angle of a clear pool, you can usually see fish swimming or lying on the bottom, or behind, or under, a snag or boulder. If you don't see fish, try your lure *quite deep* in every part of the pool, then if you don't get a strike, leave the pool and go on to the next, watching for likely water. Ten minutes on any pool with good casting and the right tackle will usually bring the fish out. After one or two fish are caught, the others often take fright and leave,



or sulk deeper, near the bottom, not to bite again. I have seen twenty big fish in a pool, and have tried it from every angle and depth, watched the lure or bait go within inches of their noses, and seen no more active interest from the fish than they gave the numerous pebbles at the bottom. Better that you leave such fish undisturbed and come back a few hours later. Then they will often take your offerings.

Much useless casting of blank parts of pools is done. Fish won't often lie where the water is forcing them to swim continually. Usually they pick a spot behind a log, boulder, bank, or channel of the stream, where there is a back-eddy of water moving against the full body of the stream. Since this back-eddy water moves comparatively slowly, the fish barely have to fin the water to remain in stabilized position. In this area the fish can usually see what comes downstream and take it if they want it. Also, much of the natural food consumed by fish drifts into these back-eddies, and is literally sedimented slowly down to them. Toss your lure to hit the full inlet of water, then let it whip down into the back-eddy, or toward the outward race of the stream. Don't bother about the bright shallows. All you will usually get there is small fry.

The greater the length of time you keep your lure cleanly in the water, the more the odds are in your favor. Some fishermen I know spend more time tying on different lures than they devote to fishing. They are in other respects good fishermen, but they don't catch many fish. Don't be afraid to ask questions of a fellow fisherman out of a feeling that you might be impertinent, or be taken as a rank amateur. Good sportsmen will always help you out, and those who won't are usually nincompoops or are suffering from stomach ulcers and too much money. You might find a man who is as anxious to swap stories and methods with you as you are with him. If so, you've got a friend for life, and the exchange of information will be mutually helpful.

It seems to me I've told you more than I really know already, but there are two other methods of fishing that are commonly practiced, namely, open-water fishing and surf casting. In open water it is wise to watch for jumping fish, or puddles of rising

## BOOK II : *Fishing*

fish, and the best places are usually near streams entering the open water, in deeply cut bays and behind islands and points of land. I find that my best results, on all but very deep-water fish, come within one hundred yards of shore, to within a few feet of it, if the water shelves off quickly. In surf fishing, it is much the same, but the fish of the sea are in such abundance as compared to the fish of the lakes, that you can drop or cast a line in almost any bit of water and hope to take some kind of fish. This is especially true on long stretches of beach. The small fry usually stay fairly close to shore, the larger fish just beyond the break of the waves, and still larger ones farther out in deep water. The farther you can get your lure out, the greater the likelihood of catching fish, for your bait is successively drawn through several areas of marine life. Fish usually school nearer shore on the incoming tide, and in the evening or early in the morning.

The fact that fishermen have been telling each other their new experiences since before the time of St. Paul will give you some idea of what there is to know about fishing. My solemn advice to you is to go *fishing anywhere*. It is like a clean bath for the soul. And now I'm finished. Well—I'm reaching for the old tackle box and rod and reel. And I'm not going to any Ladies Aid meeting or business appointment. Besides, I just invented a new lure, the Mike-Fin Illusion. How about coming along?

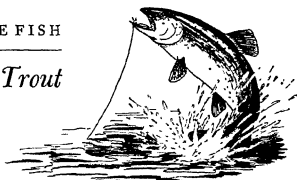
PART I

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# *Game Fish*



## 25 : *Steelhead Trout*



FISHING FOR STEELHEAD is something like taking opium. Once a steelhead catches you, your wife may as well resign herself to semiwidowhood and expect frequent tall tales; an unintelligible gibberish about hooks, lures, leaders, double- and single-tapered lines, and dewworms; sudden, unexplained absences from bed at early hours of the morning, contused hands and knees; and periods of sitting with a vacant stare in the eyes, which clearly are misted with an unholy passion. The first time around, you dangled your line in the depths of a clear mountain stream, and, lo and behold, a bolt of silver lightning did strike. You, if you didn't already know it, were struck also, so you may as well give in to the recurring fevers, because they will run their course anyway, and might even get worse.

The steelhead is a trout that spawns in the fresh water of mountain streams, then, like the salmon (from which it is hard for the unpracticed eye to distinguish it), it goes to sea. Unlike the salmon, it does not die after returning to the stream to spawn. It reconditions itself, takes on a different appearance, and once again goes to sea. It returns again and again, growing larger and more powerful with each return. The power of a six-pound steelhead on a line is something too tremendous to explain, and when a fish gets above the twelve-pound mark in fast water, a big man will find himself floundering in the stream as he joins battle with a truly worthy opponent.

Once on a line, the first antic of a steelhead is to shoot straight out of the water, shaking his head and trying to dislodge the lure. This is repeated many times, and if your hook is deep-set, there may be occasion to wish it weren't. I remember an eleven-pounder I took in the falls pool of China Creek on the west coast of Vancouver Island. I had been fishing the sixty-foot pool for more than an hour, and had landed a two-pound cutthroat and a four-pound steelhead. Using a No. 2 Bear Valley ham and egg spoon with a worm, I had just about given up hope of catching anything more when, by accident, I put my lure right into the downpour of the falls, where I had wanted it to go for an hour. I let the lure take its head and paid out a little line. Then, thinking it would snag on bottom, I gave a gentle little wind.

*Szzzzinnng! Screeeeech! Owl!*

The handles of my winder stung my fingers like a pneumatic drill. The line spun out for at least thirty yards, and I couldn't believe it. The steelhead had circled the whole pool, leaving a big loop of slack in its wake. Then it jumped out at the falls, a big silvery body with its head shaking like a wild medicine man. I wound and wound as it jumped and jumped, and, thank goodness, I didn't loop a snag or boulder. I had on a thirty-pound-test leader, because I was new to the sport, and I tried to highball the fish in with it.

About half an hour later, I turned to my companion, a dentist on a vacation, and asked him if he would take the rod for a while. He grinned and said, "You got yourself into it. You get yourself out of it."

You may wonder what this was all about. I had a yew rod about nine feet long that I had made myself, and it had a short butt that I had to place in the pit of my stomach in order to wind in the fish. Yew is a very springy wood, and every time the fish ran, it would kick the butt of the rod into my solar plexus with such a drive that I was getting sick to my stomach as well as tired.

That fish did everything from dance on its tail to sulking crosswise with the current. It tried several times to climb the falls, and several others to run out of the narrow spillway from

the pool I had to go into the water at the spillway each time to stop it. Finally, after an hour, I used low-down strategy to land it. When it took a sudden run for the spillway, I let it go, then as it almost reached the escape, I jumped into the stream and jerked the line, scaring it and turning its head toward a sandy spit. It hit the shallow water and slithered up onto the gravel beach. I jumped for it, and bounced it out onto dry land.

Since the beach was only about three feet wide, one of the funniest battles between man and fish that has ever been fought ensued. My dentist friend says he never in his life saw so many arms and legs and rods and lines flying about. It ended with me sitting waist deep in the water, with one hand sunk in the steelhead's gills, the fish clasped to my chest, like a baby held by a mother from the grasp of a kidnapper.

Such is the experience of steelheading.

How to catch them? Well, I don't know. I guess I have caught sixty, or maybe sixty-one, of them—each one in a slightly different manner from the others. On the Pacific Northwest Coast, there have been special rods developed for steelhead, going up to twelve feet in length and about two pounds in weight, monster fly fishing rods. But a steelhead can be landed on any rod from a \$2.50 steel rod, or a telescopic fly rod, to a \$150 steel-cored, split bamboo, and the cheaper the rod, the bigger the sport, as far as I am concerned. I make my own steelhead rods from either yew wood or Calcutta cane. Sure, I break them, and I have fun, too. The rod is up to the fisherman, but any rod designed for casting, with sufficient whip to take the shock out of the terrific lunges, will land a fish, if the man behind it will take the patience to play the fish—and if Lady Luck doesn't go against him. The same applies to the line, leader, and reel. I often use a five-dollar, level-wind reel in a popular brand, and although I get razzed by the experts, I dare say I land almost as many fish as some of them do.

The lures are many for this king of trout. My most popular lure is my own Mike-Fin Illusion or a No. 2 or 3 Bear Valley, well baited with an earth worm if the water is clear and the fish are cagey. I leave it unbaited in water that is brown or

murky, especially when there hasn't been much fishing of the stream. The most effective fishing I have had has been while standing well back from the pool and casting upstream, so that the big fish couldn't see me.

One funny incident I will never forget occurred on the Somas River, on Vancouver Island. I was coming home from a mountain lake, skunked. My companion and I had tried every lure in the book, but now had put on very small silver spinners with a worm, hoping to catch some ten inchers in the small brooks we passed. We came to a logging road and ambled down it. At one spot, the road curved outward around a rock bluff and hung over a small stream about twenty feet lower down and about fifty feet away. At this point, the stream formed a narrow pool about thirty feet long, ten feet deep at the greatest depth, and not more than twelve feet wide anywhere.

I don't know what possessed me to try it, but I found a clear spot and tossed my lure through the bushes at the head of the pool. I couldn't do it again in a thousand years. The lure had only drifted about two feet when a steelhead hit it and jumped for the end of the pool. I broke the rush gently (I had a two-pound-test leader on my line) and proceeded to play the fish right from the edge of the road. A crummy full of loggers came scooting down the road and stopped to allow me to climb out of their way. One of them asked me what I was doing fishing in the bushes. I told him I had a steelhead on, but he and his companions wouldn't believe me. They thought I was nuts until one of them climbed out and saw the fish splashing between the bushes. "How the hell did you get a line down there?" he asked incredulously. I just looked as foolish as I felt and kept on fighting the fish.

My companion climbed back up, and seeing my rod jerking, he came to my rescue by letting himself down the small cliff, eventually sneaking out on a log to grab the steelhead by the gills.

The point I am trying to illustrate there is that I was as completely out of the view of the fish as he was out of mine, and that, had I climbed down to the pool and shown myself



near it, I probably never would have taken him. This is only one of a dozen such fish I have taken by lucky casts into pools where it is hard to get even a strike if you came right up to the water.

As to casting upstream or downstream, I have had more luck casting upstream and retrieving fast. I think this is so because the steelhead strikes fast without a chance to identify the lure. If the fish are cagey from overfishing, the best lure is an earthworm or a dewworm on a length of shot-weighted fine gut, with a bobber set to carry the line a few inches above the bottom. You have to know your pools to do this type of fishing, which is generally known as "drifting a worm" with a bobber. I have done it and enjoyed my amateurish results. The best results are attained by getting up as close to the head of a pool as possible, and maneuvering the leader and bobber into the current, then letting it drift with the current all over the pool, or to where you can actually see the fish. Frankly, it is one devilish job to do.

The use of salmon eggs is forbidden in many streams, and rightly, I think. The eggs of the salmon (whose runs the steelhead follow upstream) are very sure bait for the big steelhead. They will take it when nothing else will tempt them. Where roe can be used, the best method that I know is to employ a very small spinner and a single egg, or to drift a single egg in the same manner that a worm is drifted. There is also a method known as a "strawberry," which consists of putting a glob of roe into a patch of red-dyed cheesecloth and tying it to the hook. It works, but I don't like it. Too messy, like giving a new girl a box of chocolates and a bunch of gardenias, then putting a Mickey Finn into her sarsaparilla.

Lures commonly used with success are the Devon Minnow, T-Spoon, Bucktail Fly, Gibbs Silver and Copper spinners, Flatfish, Abalone, and my Mike-Fin. The steelhead is the boss of the creeks, and he will strike at anything that touches his fancy *when he is in the mood*. During his long life in the ocean waters, his desire is for minnows, shrimp (a much-used bait), and all small fish. Consequently, when he goes to fresh water, he will strike at anything that shines and moves.

If you are fond of your home and family, I'd suggest you

BOOK II : *Fishing*

think twice about going steelhead fishing. Because, if you do go, you may catch your first steelhead, and unless you die of heart failure (which is a possibility), you will never catch your last one. Ask my wife if you don't believe me.

## 26: *Pacific Coast Salmon*



MY FIRST SALMON was caught on a piece of net-selvage twine with a hunk of piano-wire leader, a nipple from a water pipe for a weight, and a beat-up old No. 3 Diamond Brass Spoon for a lure. The thrill of fighting that fish in and landing it in a dugout canoe has been etched on my memory ever since. The last eighteen-pound salmon that I landed were taken on a yew-wood rod I made myself, but equipped with a good, black-silk line and a Shakespeare spinning reel. It doesn't seem to me that the long drawn-out thrill of battling these amazing sporting fish, which actually swim and jump their way up waterfalls, diminishes with the years.

Once so plentiful at the time of spawning in the inland waters of Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon that old-time navigators claimed the runs impeded the passage of ships, the salmon has borne the onslaught of every commercial rig for catching fish that has been invented, from the time of the Old Testament prophets to the present day. Despite this slaughter by the greedy canners, the runs have continued each year, greatly diminished, but still enormous. When I was a youngster, I remember one creek near my home which had barely any water in it in the summer. It seems only fantasy, in relation to what now prevails, but in that stream, when the fall freshets brought the salmon up and the water was about one foot deep and fifteen feet across, I saw pools so filled with salmon that it

would have been possible to walk across them to the other side, literally as one would tread apples packed in a barrel. That run is entirely gone and only an odd steelhead or trout is now found meandering into the still unpolluted waters.

The Pacific salmon is not to be confused with the Atlantic salmon, any more than the trout is to be confused with the char. This magnificent game fish, although much the same in appearance as a trout, is set apart by the fact that it lives a varying length of time from two to five years, depending upon species. And once having spawned in the waters of its birth, it dies. The genus is *Oncorhynchus*, and, despite so poor a start in the way of a name, it is considered one of the top game fishes of the world. There are five distinct varieties, with several variations under each, depending upon the area in which they are caught, but for the sportsman there are only three varieties that can be considered game fish. They are known by different names in adjoining localities, which causes much misunderstanding among sportsmen. To clear it up a bit, a little discussion may be in order.

The coho, or silver, salmon is a fish with a reddish orange flesh, rarely varying in color, bluish on the back, with silver reaching to the tail, going from three to thirty pounds in weight, depending upon where it is caught, the farther north, the larger the fish. The runs start in late August and continue until October, and occasionally November.

The spring, tyee, jack spring, Chinook, king, quinnat, or Columbia River salmon is considered by sportsmen to be tops in fly fishing the world over. It can have anything from a sickly white-colored flesh to a rich and lovely scarlet, and it will weigh anywhere from three to one hundred and ten pounds. This salmon runs all year, but more heavily from September to April.

The third and least popular is the humpback salmon, which provides more abundant, if less exciting, sport than the two former fish. It is pinkish in flesh, small in size, running from three to six pounds, with very small scales and a greenish color. It is easily distinguished from the other varieties once seen. A powerful game fish when taken as it enters the sounds, it soon dim-

inishes in quality and appearance, developing a large, narrow hump at the shoulders. The runs are very great, and in a good year it is not unusual to take twenty or thirty on one line in a day of fishing.

The other two salmon, the sockeye or blueback, and the dog, keta, or calico salmon, are not generally for the sportsman, as they do not feed, once having entered the straits and sounds. The sockeye salmon, which is the prime canning fish because of its bright red colored flesh and even size (running from three to ten pounds), can be caught with a rod and reel. Several years ago, when I was working for a canner buying fish, I offered a fifty-dollar bill to any fisherman who would bring me a fair-caught sockeye salmon that had been taken on a trolled lure. This was done because, even among the fishermen, there was a tendency to believe that the sockeye could be caught in the sea by trollers. The fifty dollars was never claimed, although many of my fishermen said they would make me eat my words. Having cleaned many thousands of sockeyes myself, and never having found the slightest trace of food in their stomachs, I did not believe they would ever take a lure.

It was a good thing for me that those men did not know of the sockeye in the Stamp Falls Pool of Vancouver Island. I later took as many as six in an afternoon on a fly or Bear Valley Spinner, *but some of them were foul hooked*, not purposely. However, most were taken in the mouth. The only explanation I have is that the fish were coming close to their spawning grounds (although in lovely, bright silver condition), and on seeing the line and lure, or on being touched by either, they bit at the strange intruder to protect themselves. They matched the steelhead trout for speed, stamina, and out-of-the-water acrobatics. Indeed, the sockeye is a sporting fish that will try the cunning and skill of any fisherman! In further explanation, I might mention that the particular pool in which they are caught will harbor a varying population of from two hundred to one thousand fish, consisting of many varieties—steelhead, cutthroat and Kamloops trout, cohoes, and jack spring salmon, and it is the trout for which the angler is trying, not the sockeyes. The dog or keta

BOOK II : *Fishing*

salmon, as far as I know, has never been caught on a lure, as it does not feed after entering the sounds and straits. This is proven by the fact that ichthyologists have yet to identify the feed of either it or the sockeye salmon. However, when it is taken by net at sea, it is a beautiful fish, going from six to twelve pounds, mossy green in color, with a faint indication of par marks on the sides, the flesh being rather disappointing in color, a greyish pink, but it is very rich and tasty to eat.

Of catching salmon, as Izaak Walton might have said, there are many ways, and of each method there are ardent devotees who say theirs is the only one. Much depends on the fishing locality. I remember years ago a friend of mine visiting me while I was policing the Campbell River area, which is world famed for its tyee (or spring) salmon. Ray wanted to take a coho on a fly. I explained to him that the best places for fly fishing were around the kelp beds, or at the estuary of the river itself, because the estuary was shallow and the fish would be near the surface, while around the kelp beds they would be feeding on small fry that also swam near the surface. Ray chose the kelp beds, and I'll admit I never saw such patience. Coho were being caught by the half dozen in rowboats that were trolling lures. But Ray, the purest of pure fly-fishermen, looked upon them disdainfully and plied his fly at each sign of a swirl among the bobbing kelp beds. Each night I would ask him how the fishing was going, and he would grin and say "Fine I got into several rises today." At the end of the sixth day, I came home from patrol, but there was no need to ask him how it went. He just grinned and led me to the icebox. His eyes were sparkling as he opened the door.

"How do you like those?" he exhaled grandly.

There were two beautiful silver-sided coho salmon lying on bronze kelp, with the golden orange meat showing where he had slit the pure white bellies. They were six and eight pounds respectively, and he had taken them on a red-white-and-silver bucktail fly. We consumed the better part of a quart of old Scotch as my wife baked one salmon with parsley and onion stuffing. Ray told of his conquests to the minutest detail.

"I've caught a lot of fish, Mike," he said seriously, "but a jumping, dashing, tackle-busting coho salmon on a five-ounce rod is the primest sport I have ever had. If it had taken me six months, instead of six days, I'd have been satisfied. That eight-pounder literally beat the bay to a froth. The fly and the line were so light that he didn't tire for over an hour."

So, that is one way. The coho, when running in the sounds, is a shallow feeder. It is seldom necessary to go more than five feet down for these fish. Although I have taken coho on a spinner in fresh-water pools, and once or twice in salt water with a cast lure, I have taken possibly hundreds with a trolled spoon, which is the usual tackle. A fifteen-pound-test line of any nature, with half an ounce of lead, three feet of gut or piano wire, and anything from a Number Two Diamond or spinner will take them. Add a flasher, willow troll, and/or a strip of herring, or a freshly caught minnow herring, and the sport is on. But it may be reduced as the weight of tackle increases, yet the possibilities of catching a fish are multiplied. The coho is a fighter who breaks water at the set of the hook. When he dances on his tail near your boat, your heart leaps almost as high as he does. He will sulk, backtrack, and make you think you have lost him, or that he has quit, but don't let these tricks fool you. Until he rolls over on his belly for the last time near the stern, he is one big hunk of fight. Many a coho is lost just at that time, in one final plunge on a line held too tightly.

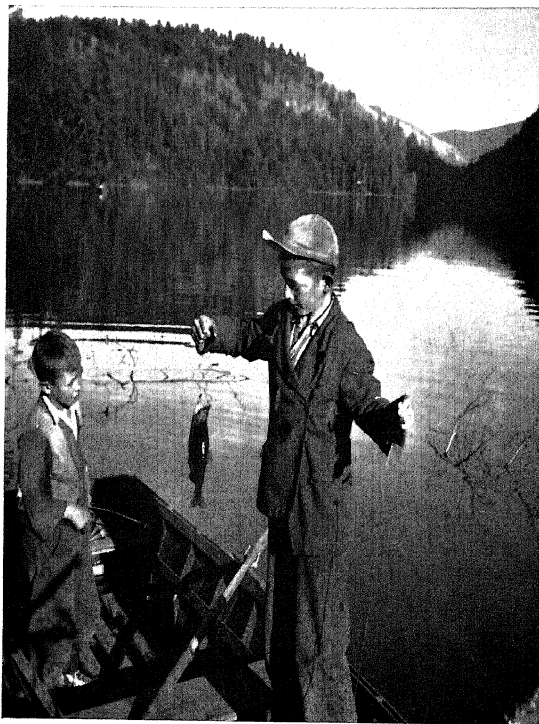
The spring salmon (king or tyee), like the grizzly among animals, is the show piece. Ranging from five to one hundred and ten pounds, he is seldom seen until you boat him, because his tendency is to sound. But you can never forget you have him on the line. From the first set of the hook in his massive jaws, you think it is possible you have a shark or a whale on. The power of the big ones, weighing from twenty-five pounds up, is unbelievable. They will tow a boat with four people in it, if the line is strong enough, and when they take a run, it is not unusual to lose two hundred yards of line.

I remember one thirty-five pound red spring I took on regulation Tyee Club tackle that cost me ten dollars to land. Fishing

at the time I have found best, just as it is growing dark, I hooked into the big male in a tide rip. He sounded, and then my line went limp. I began to reel in fast, only to have the slack feel as if there had been an explosion on the end of the cuttyhunk. For over an hour extending into the darkness, he sounded and sulked, tugged and battled. Our boat was towed by him and carried by the tide over three miles. My wife, who was with me, did her best on the oars but was growing tired, and out of sympathy for her, I decided to gaff the fish (a practice I don't believe in, and for that reason have never owned a gaff). Maneuvering the big dark body to the stern of the boat, I lunged out sloppily and hooked the spring, not through the gill plates, but in the soft flesh just behind. With a jerk, he dove and almost yanked me into the water. Struggling for a moment, with water being slapped all over me, I finally got enough strength to pull him inboard. He lit on the back seat as the gaff tore out, smashed my glasses, which I had taken off because of darkness, and started to pound the planking out of the bottom of the hull. Blood spurted all over both our clothes and the plug flew out, to be smashed by one blow of his head. I finally managed to stun him with the butt of an oar. That fish had another hour's battle in him if he hadn't been gaffed. His first lunge in the water had broken the haft of a sturdy gaff, and on falling on the gunnel from the power of his yank, I had cracked a rib. That was the last fish I ever gaffed.

Methods of taking the spring salmon are much the same as for the coho, but fishing is usually done much deeper, going down several fathoms. Of late years, a practice known as strip-ping has come into being and is very effective. One uses a light line and large rod. A strip of herring is cut from the side of a large fish and placed on the hook. No weight, or at best very small split shot, is used to sink the bait. The boat is anchored off a point of land, or over shoals where the fish are known to pass or feed. A somewhat easy-going method, it is probably one of the most sporting (since the tackle used is light), and it produces excellent results. The bait is allowed to drift out with the tide, hence judgment of depth is an important factor. The strip





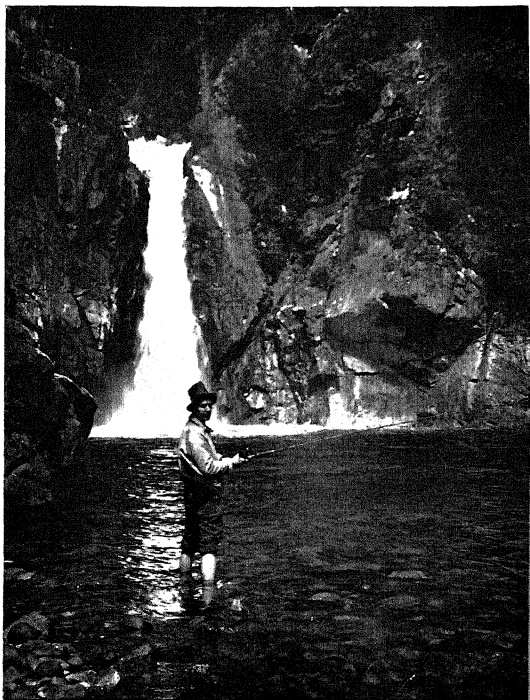
*Time in thy flight:* "Let me be a boy again, and give me a pin and a piece of string, and I'll catch you a Kokanee salmon!"



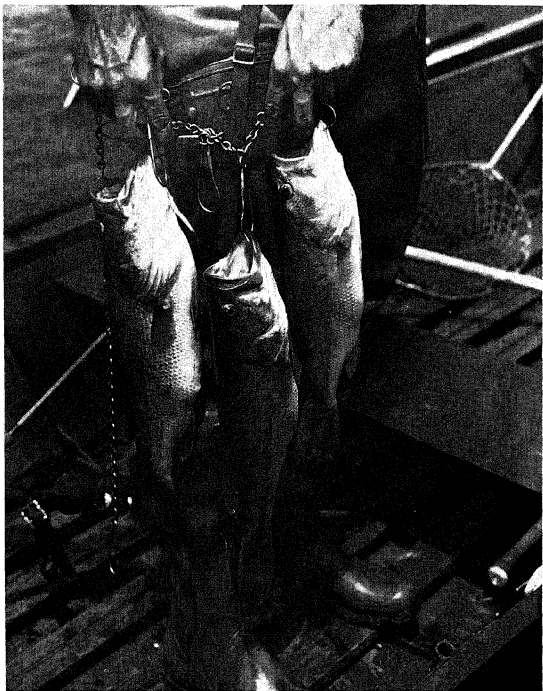
*Above:* Vern Norris, right, telling me how it's done on the wild waters of one of our British Columbia streams in February. The fish? A steelhead, chomping on the "Mike-Fin" Illusion, a lure of my invention



*Left:* You've probably seen this one before, but, if it's not the best steelhead ever taken, it's still the best shot of a Scot (Alan Maclean) at the moment of victory. Campbell River, British Columbia, weight 17½ pounds!



*Sure-fire*: when you can find this kind of pool, you can't miss. But first find the pool. Bare shanks instead of waders indicate back country and no room for anything but essentials on tramping in. Pistol in holster at hip is for bears.



*Large-mouth Bass*: they make life sweeter along the northern lakes, in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Florida, notably, because of abundant fresh-water lakes and clear streams.



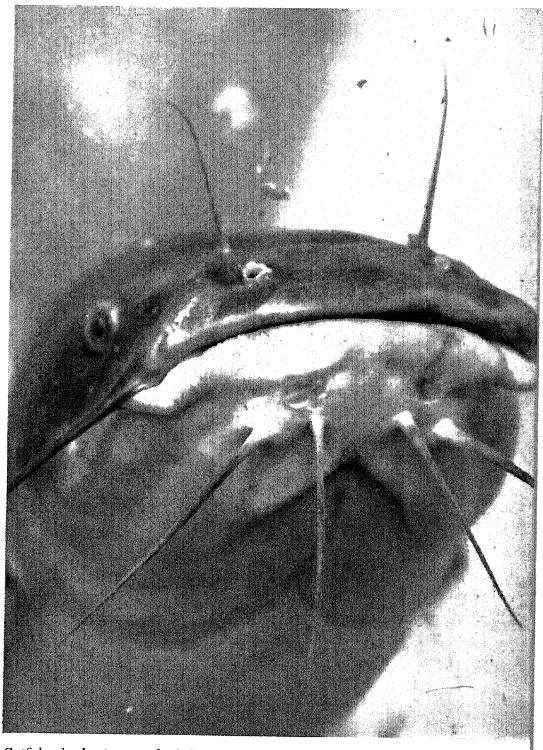
*Left:* rainbows in the half light and shade at the forest's edge. Some are 16 inches in length

*Below:* you don't have to be as experienced as George Yung to catch lake trout like these 14- to 18-inchers, but it helps





*Tye Salmon*: taken on Campbell River, British Columbia, where they run large. Note very large spinner, set to run deep. This is all the salmon you need for a week.



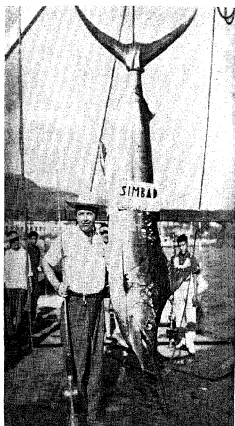
*Catfish*: the business end of things for noodlers, as seen by Larry Gaffney. See text for difference between this device and hand grenade at short range.



*Ocean Game Fish: Above: Bob Wunsch, noted St. Louis sportsman, with sailfish*

*Right: J. Eldon Peek, Oklahoma City, with fine blue-marlin catch taken at Acapulco*

*Below: Bob Wunsch's sailfish fighting it out*





of herring in restive water has a movement not unlike the wiggle of a small fish, but the attraction of a silver spoon or flasher is missing.

There is a story I like probably better than any on salmon, because I actually saw it. Frank Smith, a buddy of mine, who went down one night over Bremen, had just arrived out on the coast from the prairies. He had caught bass, pike, and suckers, as I had, before coming to the coast. He thought that fishing was okay, but not too interesting. I took him out on my launch to a Bowen Island summer resort dance. Ladies were more in our thoughts at that time, but on the following Sunday morning we rose early, and I suggested trolling for salmon. Not too enthusiastic, Frank took one of my rods in hand and, tilting down his sun helmet to cover his eyes, he lolled back in the fishing cockpit fully relaxed. It was twenty minutes passage to the point at which the best fishing was to be had, so while reviving from his dancing activities of the previous night, he drifted into easy somnolence. I steered close to the small bay in which I had caught many salmon and cut the motor right down to a throb that eased us in a circle near the bay.

*Zzzzzrrrrring!*

The ratchet on the reel shrieked like a whipped banshee. Frank grabbed at the rod and held it, jerking it in front of him as if he had just grabbed a writhing cobra before it struck. He might just as well have been holding a broom. The line was burning his hands, and he had a goofy, sleep-befuddled look on his face. He was reacting by pure instinct.

"What the hell's the matter? We run into something? We sinking?" he exclaimed. Then, with growing consternation in his face, he saw his hands gripping the jerking rod. "Jeepers! Take this thing away. What is it?"

"Hold onto the slack," I yelled with mirth. "It's a coho."

I pointed to the silver fish a hundred yards away, skipping on its tail in the bay, shaking its head to the rattle of the lure in its mouth. Frank gaped at the fish.

"That damn thing on here?" he asked me

I nodded.

"You take it," he pleaded. "From last night I'm not strong enough."

Twenty minutes later, with my persuasion and help, Frank had the fish alongside the boat. He was sweating and breathing hard, blood on his knuckles where the winder on the reel had hit them, intent as a boxer on the last punch.

"Don't try to lift it with the line!" I warned him. "I'll get it by the gills. Don't lift—Oh, cripes!"

He had tried to lift the fish by the line. The hook had straightened out with one terrific downward heave, but the fish stayed momentarily stunned on the surface.

"You've lost it!" I said in an anguished voice.

I didn't know Frank very well then. Although fully clothed, he whipped off his pith sun-helmet and dived overboard, with the helmet held in front of him like a platter. How he did it I'll never know, but he got that six-pound coho into the helmet and raised it above the water.

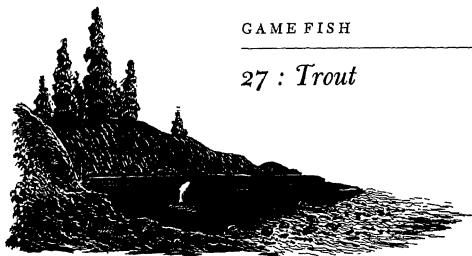
"Grab him," he yelled, treading water and holding the fish high. I made a grab and the fish made a jump. That was the last we ever saw of him. I was laughing so hard I couldn't have grabbed a starfish out of a tide pool. I never saw Frank so mad or disappointed. He said, "Gees! If that was a salmon, I've never caught a fish before!"

There are hundreds of stories of salmon that tend to draw upon the imagination. The story, for example of losing a salmon, and in an hour the same fisherman takes the fish again and finds his own lure imbedded in its mouth. There is the analogous story of taking a fish with several lures imbedded in its mouth. But the most amazing salmon adventure happened to me when a five-pound jack spring that I had hooked and fought for about twenty minutes, finally came alongside, but the loosened lure came out of its mouth. I muttered oaths as I saw the stunned fish sitting in the water, and started to lift my lure out. The fish suddenly spurted forward and grabbed the spinning metal once again. I battled the fish in again, removed the lure, and didn't have the heart to kill it. I placed it back in the water, and it darted away to look for fresh waters and things to conquer. How

GAME FISH : *Salmon*

could a guy eat a fish with fighting heart like that? It would have been cannibalism!

27 : *Trout*



PERHAPS THE FISH that has healed more stomach ulcers than any doctor, distracted more new brides than any gossip, and accounted for more young boys' not being able to sit down than any teacher is the trout. Caught with equal sport six thousand to nine thousand feet up in the center of the North American continent and in the depths of the sea, the trout is called many names, but he is never anything but a *game fish*. Characterized by extreme variations of color and size, from the thirty-five-pound, record-size steelhead and the sixty-pound, record Atlantic salmon to the four-inch "brook trout," the trout of our continent are indeed big and little. But there are actually only three species of native trout here: the cutthroat, the steelhead, the rainbow, and the Atlantic salmon.

Water, feed, and habits account for many of the differences in fish. Some fish commonly called trout are actually members of the char family, the Pacific salmon family, the graylings, or even the bass family. The characteristic habits of trout to spawn, recondition, and return to open water clearly set them apart from the salmon. The coloring that sets them apart from the char is most evident in that a char commonly has several colored spots *all lighter than its body*, while a true trout has only darker spots. The members of the bass family are as different from trout as a dog is from a cat, and the grayling looks more like the herring, to which family it is also closely related.

Many years ago in Alaska, I went fishing with some friends near Skagway, and we took what I remember as cutthroat trout. Last year while in Mexico, I watched what the Mexicans called "*trucha*," in a fast-flowing river of clear, spring origin, at an altitude of approximately five thousand feet. There is no doubt in my mind that, if the fish were not identical in species, at least they were so close that a trained ichthyologist would have difficulty placing the location from whence they were taken. For the purposes of this chapter, since this is a book of experiences and methods, not taxonomy, I will include among the trout all those commonly known as such, except the full-grown steelhead and Atlantic salmon, usually caught in the lakes, ponds, and small streams, and which normally live out most of their life cycles in a body of fresh water.

To mention a few names by which they are called, we have: rainbow trout, speckled trout, silver trout, mountain trout, Kamloops trout, Yellowstone trout, cutthroat trout, Rio Grande trout, Colorado trout, greenback, yellowfin, blueback, Oregon brook trout, McCloud River rainbow trout, golden trout of Mt. Whitney, and Kern River trout. There are many others. The main differences among them, as has been stated, consist of color and size, but there is also a definite structural difference between the cutthroat and the rainbow, or steelhead. I have noticed in California that the rainbow trout is much more highly colored with red and yellow, and this coloration I would suggest comes from the chameleon-like ability of a trout to change hue according to the water around it and the land under it. In assisting one game department in the dumping of hatchery trout into fresh, clear lakes, I have actually watched the fry change from a darkish brown-green to a sandy light grey in the course of a few minutes. I won't attempt to explain this facility, but it seems to me natural that a fish in yellowish water running in a channel with reddish-hued bottom would of accord be different in coloration from a fish from a clear-water, gray-bottomed stream or lake. I remember when I was eight years of age taking almost black trout from the depths of a mill pond which was predominantly lined with cedar bark, because of the thousands of tons of shingle bolts

that were dumped from the flume into the waters. The water was almost amber in color when cupped in the palm of the hand. With those same trout on a pronged stick, Jimmy McCullough and I clambered over half a mile of bush and rock to the waters of Cypress Creek, and there took several silvery bright trout. Frying them in the open, we could tell which trout were our own by the color of the skins. The trout were the same fish, yet to us they were "brown mountain trout" and "rainbows." Moreover, the flesh of trout will vary from a bright orange hue to a snowy whiteness. I have noticed that this variation seems more frequent in the Kamloops or steelhead group, less so in the cutthroat, the cutthroat seeming most often to have light or a faint yellow flesh. Again, I have no explanation.

While fishing Sproat Lake, which is on Vancouver Island a short distance from the sea, I remember one very distinct separation of fish. George Young, a patient and admirable companion of half-Chinese, half-Indian parentage, and I had been trolling and casting intermittently since five in the morning. By noon we had some twenty "silversides" or "Kamloops" trout. Since the fish had quit biting on the dark side of the lake, we scooted across a mile of choppy water to the cliffs in the distance. After about an hour of trolling and casting, I hit into a fish that broke water all over the lake, a much more active creature than the other trout. On boating this one, we were very surprised to notice that it was predominantly yellow-gold, with more red, definitely darker spots, and completely yellow pectoral and ventral fins. George immediately identified the fish as a "yellowfin," and I as a "cutthroat." The fish looked much like the well-known California fish, the golden trout.

Every time we passed the same promontory and small bay, at which spot the water was very deep, we hooked into a couple of these fish, taking about ten of them. When the fish were placed in the bottom of the boat with the others, they revealed a difference as great as possible between two trout species. The later caught fish all had the reddish underjaw common to cutthroat trout, and from which they derive their name.

I tried both a fly and a lure on them, only to find that they

didn't take either nearly as readily as they did the trolled spinner and worm. On the other hand, the bright Kamloops-rainbow would take flies and lures quite readily. Here I explain the difference in the fishes' actions by the depth of the water. The bright fish were taken in the shoaling water of the shallow side of the lake. Returning to the same spot at week intervals on my day off, I caught only six of the "yellowfins" the first week, and only two the following week, but the "silversides" had also dropped off, for the lake was growing warmer as July neared.

Where to take fish and when to take them are probably the most often asked questions. As to when, except for definite season, I frankly don't know. Trout have come regularly to my lure before and during a thunderstorm, after a thunderstorm, and in sunlight and rain. Many men say trout will not bite before, during, or right after a lightning storm. Some of my best catches have been made at these times, because I stayed out purposely to see what happened. I think that the inclemency of the weather drives the fisherman to the beach and shelter, while his interest in fish is lessened. Some men say fish will not bite after a moonlight night. I have caught record lots during weeks of completely cloudless, moonlight nights and summer days. Many fishermen agree that the trout will not bite after a big hatch of ants has drifted over the waters. I have caught trout so full of black ants that, when the hand was placed around the belly to open the mouth and remove the hook, the fish disgorged chunks of matted insects that spilled out the gills and anus and ran down my wrists. Those fish were literally so chuck-full of ants that their bellies crackled as if they were bags full of dried peas. Certainly they were *not* hungry

My experience seems to indicate that if a fisherman is crazy enough (and I don't hide my own eccentricities) to go out fishing before sunrise, and stay out until dark, fishing all the time, he will catch fish sometime during the day. Trout will always take a lure sometime from dawn to dusk, and *during the night, too*, if a fisherman will angle for them. I commonly go out on a lake with the coming of light, fish until I'm tired, laze and sleep in the boat or ashore until I feel like fishing again, and then angle

until it is pitch black Yes, I like fishing and I don't care if school keeps or the fish bite. If you want the averages in your favor for catching more fish than the experts say is possible on the basis of time, place, and food, I suggest you give it a try.

Trout are commonly caught in the early spring, summer, and fall, but they can be caught through the ice, too. As a matter of fact, it is a fairly well-known sport, in northern British Columbia at least, to skate big trout into the shallows of the glare ice and chop them out with an axe. It is a sport I'd like to try once Any fish that couldn't get away from me when I'm on a pair of skates deserves to be culled out as a sport of inferior quality!

Weather which becomes rigorous to the fisherman often cuts down his enthusiasm for the pastime of angling. I'd say that, rather the sportsman gets his fill in fine weather and sloughs off his fishing during the less comfortable days, not that the fishing becomes very much worse.

Where to take trout is, in this chapter, still unanswered, but no one can say that trout are always caught in one type of spot. In streams, one beautiful piece of deep water, with shoals at the end and overhanging banks on the sides, will produce a wonderful bag, whereas the next almost identical pool will be entirely bereft of fish. One stretch of fast running water will not have a fish in it, while the next will have trout behind every big boulder. I have noticed that the juncture of a small stream with a larger one usually produces a good number of rises, also the water that lies beneath falls, either large or small. In the case of the joining of small streams, it is natural that trout should lie there, due to the food that comes to them from the smaller creek. In such cases, I always place my lure so that it hits the water at the juncture of the smaller creek with the larger, and floats, or drifts, out and downstream in the main current of the larger one. This is the natural direction from which the trout expect food. In the case of falls, I always try to smack my lure into the falling water, let it sink momentarily, then draw away from the falls. Although it is the easiest method to lose lures, because of the push of current downward, and the open network of boulders washed free of sand and gravel, the cast into the falls is prime



for me. Sure, I lose lures and cuss to beat hell and lie to my wife about how much they cost, but I catch an odd fish or two.

There are many ways to cast a lure and many lures and rods to cast them with. My mediocre success comes from a cast that shows the least movement of body, the greatest accuracy of placement, and the most exact method of retrieve. When a lure hits the water, it seems best to let it sink, if it is the wet (or underwater) type, and retrieve with a series of jerky motions, with an occasional dead period. Sometimes a trout will hit the lure the instant it touches the surface, then run like wildfire. Other times it will rise slowly, eye the lure, and sink down again, or follow it curiously right to the end of the retrieve. If they are hitting instantly, there is no problem, and a fast set of the hook is in order. If they rise slowly, I find a live bait (worm, bug, roe, shrimp, minnow, etc.) is the best method of enticing them to bite. The faster the water, the more speed of the strike, as the fish is out to get the food before it disappears. A fast retrieve from a cast is almost a necessity in fast water, and it is imperative to keep the line fairly taut, because the lure will go down in one of the roiling currents and snag in the boulders or branches. A fish in fast water is seldom seen until it hits.

In slow, or still, water I have found that the strike almost always comes a few feet after the lure hits the water, and I have many times been able to watch the actual movements of the trout. In still waters, the trout usually hangs close to a log, overhang of the bank, or near lily and reed growth. Placing the lure just at the edge of the shade, allowing it to sink momentarily, I have seen trout dart from the shadows, drive directly at the lure, feint at it, by-pass it with a flick of the tail, and stand off watching it. A quick lift of the rod will speed the lure away from them, and many times make them plunge a second time mouth open. There will seldom be more than two feints before a good strike is felt, or the fish will return to the depths. It might take twenty casts into the same position to raise that trout again, or it may take only one. It may also never again be seen. If you have had such an experience, I suggest trying a different hour of the day the next time. The fish may be more avid for feed later or earlier.

One rule I always adhere to is to stay out of sight of the water, or to show very slow and deliberate movements if it is necessary to enter the stream or pool. Fish will always dart away from movement above or near them. It is a good idea to remain still for some time before casting, then use as little arm and body movement as possible to achieve a cast.

I think more people troll for trout than use a cast lure, and, depending on the depths and water conditions, there are many means other than fly casting for taking them. I'm not a purist, as you no doubt have noticed, and I enjoy trolling and lolling in the sun just as much as I do any other sport. Trolling for trout on a sun-drenched lake combines relaxation and sport to the *nth* degree, particularly with a good, slow motor to ease the burden of rowing. Almost any rod will do the trick, although a light rod and tackle give the fish the biggest fighting chance, and the fisherman the most sport. For trout, my best luck has been with a willow leaf troll and a worm, or some bright spinning lure with at least two silver, brass, chromium, or copper attracters, attached to which, at the extreme end, was a worm on about six inches of gut. I don't advise colored lures for trout, nor have I had anything but mediocre luck with the chromium-finish flashers. A dull silver seems to be the best attracter, with or without red-colored beads, the beads being attractive to the fisherman but not to the fishes. I don't think the beads do any harm, but a fish seldom hits the bare lure unless cast. It has ample time to identify the fraudulency of both the spinners and beads, but is attracted by them, then it bites the lure. Even if the worm only becomes bedraggled, broken, or washed out, it will be poor bait and should be changed. One thing that is absolute death to success in trolling is reed or grass growth hanging anywhere from the lure or line. Fish are not dopey enough to think any swimming animal will have a bunch of foliage hanging on it. As Vern Norris always says, "Hell, fish don't like salad with their meat!" I advise frequent examination of the trolled lure if there is drift in the water, and always after a tug on the line. If it is a fish, but it isn't on the line, there is every likelihood that the worm isn't either. If it was a snag, there'll likely be foliage on the hook.

Trolling seems best a short distance from shore, up to about one hundred yards out, where the water begins to deepen, or to within a few feet of shore along sheer drops. Fishing in the lake center never produced any fish for me. Too, if there are streams running into the lake, the estuary of the incoming water is invariably the best on the lake. Fairly shallow spots, where lily growth forms at the edges of the lake, will provide a very worthwhile diversion in casting or fly fishing, but it is practically useless to troll there.

As to equipment for trout fishing, it depends on the individual. A bent pin and a hastily pulled thread from a garment, tied onto the end of a long slender pole and baited with a bug or worm will yank an unsuspecting brook trout from a small brook. I have actually used such a haphazard piece of equipment, baited with a *red huckleberry*, and have actually taken a six-inch trout. That was many years ago, but I'd suggest it as a worthwhile experiment in any good trout waters.

There is no doubt that fly-fishing is the most sportsmanlike, most difficult and tantalizing of all methods of taking trout. A man does not usually become a good fly-fisherman in less than a year, and often not in several years. However, when he has become such an expert he will take as many fish as the man who uses the advantage of all baits. There is an amazing variety of fly rods, reels, and flies, each sworn to by enthusiasts as the one and only for all occasions. Probably the lightest rod, lightest leader, and smallest lure give the most thrills and require of the fisherman the greatest skill in handling a trout.

Bait-casting and spinning rods are the next least difficult to master. Again there is skill required, and an immense issue of rods, reels, lures, and baits. I learned to use a spinning reel and rod in one afternoon, perhaps as well as I will ever be able to use them, and I don't think that duplicating it would be a difficult feat for anyone above my moronic intelligence. From a spinning rod most of my fishing enjoyment comes, and I have found it will land a barracuda as well as steelhead, catfish, or rock cod, and to me it is the best method of catching trout under all the prevailing conditions.

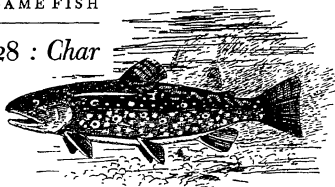
There would be no use for me to try to tell anyone how to use fishing equipment, because I do everything in an unorthodox (or, as my brother Pat puts it, "cock-eyed") manner. If I want to get more distance, or cast against the wind, I put on more weight. I can take trout behind me with a flyrod equally as well as in front, if I happen to be on a promontory or log that juts far out into the water. Having more than once been slapped in the back of the neck with a flying trout that somehow got hooked on my back cast, I now take pains with my mistakes! There is one thing only at which I am expert. I can untangle a bad backlash or snarl with as much speed as the next guy. It may be that I have had more practice at it than some.

If there is a school of casting in your neighborhood, it is a good idea to attend it. If there isn't, I'd suggest you make yourself as little obnoxious as you can to the nearest known "expert" and bother him until he either takes you out or shows you how in the living room, or the front lawn. The front lawn incidentally is the best possible place to practice placing a lure, and don't worry what the neighbors think. They would probably be just as embarrassed if you peaked into their bedroom. To casual strollers who ask me, "Caught any fish today?" I usually reply, "Yes. You're the sixth sucker." Very funny. Very funny. Anyway it makes me feel better. Try it. It will make you feel smart and improve your casting for the next time you go out after trout.

The best lures? Salmon eggs, very deadly; worms, minnows, shrimps, grasshoppers, all about the same if you are going to use bait. You already know what I use.

Trout fried in butter with bacon fried separately, and laid across them . . . This is not what killed Cock Robin. He died a natural death at the hands of his enemies.

28 : *Char*



OF ALL THE FISHES, the char seems to have produced the most controversy. More men seem to get heated up over the game qualities, the edible value, and the actual genera of the fish, than over all other fish put together. One reason may be that the char lives all over North America, north of the Mexican border, and assumes such varying color and shape, and so many names, as to be confusing to many observers. To name a few, Dolly Varden trout, brook trout, speckled trout, Dublin pond trout, long-finned char, Greenland char, Arctic char, Sunapee trout, American saibling, bull trout, lake trout, gray trout, Oquassa trout, blue-back trout, Marston trout, Makinaw trout, Siscowet, all fish of the genera *Cristivomer* Gill and Jordan, and *Salvelinus* Richardson. The former genus has two species, Great Lakes trout and Siscowet, the latter genus, four species, and some six or more subspecies. And the char (plural here; there is no s required) range in weight at maturity from a few ounces to at least 125 pounds, from six inches to over four feet, colored from almost silver to deep black, brown, red, yellow, and green. The one unmistakable identifying coloration, to my eyes at least, is the presence of spotting that is lighter than the rest of the background, a similar spot never being found in true trout.

Years ago, while fishing on Lake Pend d'Oreille in Idaho, we hooked into half a dozen of the big Dolly Vardens, and I remember the first impression that the fish on Reg Brown's line

made on us. We were trolling in a rowboat not far off shore, allowing our lines to go deep. Reg had a sudden, strong pull on his line that flipped the rod out of his hands. I hastily backwatered with the oars, thinking he was fast into a sunken log. There had been no screaming *whirr* of the reel, no jumping splash of the fish behind, and I wasn't thinking in terms of trout. He hollered at me to keep pulling gently until he got his line straightened out. I began to argue.

"Hell, Reg! You're snagged!"

"Yeh," he laughed. "*Snagged* into a bull trout!"

The tip of his rod began to dip to the waves, the line to screech off his drum. I was surprised.

"You're into a big Kamloops trout [*landlocked steelhead*]," I fairly squealed.

"Bull trout!" snorted Reg, grinding away at his bucking reel and rod. "Sure, I've caught lots of them. Great fighters."

About twenty minutes later he had the big gray-green fish alongside the boat. It sulked, rushed, rolled, and bore down, but never once did it jump or break water. It was an underwater battle with no holds barred. Reg was sweating, and he weighed over two hundred pounds with no fat I was impressed. When we boated the fish, a six-pounder, I was amazed. Here was a trout I had never seen, long and deep in the body like a tyee spring salmon, square in the tail, and bright silver on the sides. Reg said it was a bull trout, or Dolly Varden, or laker. I had caught many Kamloops, cutthroat, and coho salmon, but had never hooked a Dolly Varden. It didn't seem that the stories other fishermen had told me about the char could be true. Reg Brown had enjoyed a real battle landing this six-pounder.

Later in the afternoon I hooked a four-pounder in a shallow bay, and it broke water only once. Not a thrilling, high-jumping rush with a rattling lure, but a businesslike smash out of the water as the beach shallowed. The fish headed for deep water and played my arms until they were tired. My opinion of Dolly Vardens changed completely at once. The fish was game!

Later, while fishing the waters of Campbell Lake on Vancouver Island, I took two or three Dolly Vardens on another troll,

caught indiscriminately with the famed silvery rainbow trout of that lake. Catching them on a troll, at the same time I took true trout, I had a good chance to study the action of the fish, and to compare them in size to the rainbow trout. It was disappointing. The char didn't break water or put up as lengthy a battle as the trout. The Dolly Vardens went down again in my estimation. Moreover, they tasted muddy in the August waters of the lake and were much less firm-fleshed at the end of the day than were the rainbows.

At game meetings, I listened to the oral battles between men over the qualities of the char, Dolly Varden, and brookies, versus the true trout, rainbow, cutthroat, and steelhead, and I always sided with the advocates of the true trout. That is, until I hit fifteen Eastern brook trout (char) in a mountain lake. I'll never forget that experience.

We were after black bears that had been marauding in a permanent ski camp owned by Al De Hart and some of his friends. Al had told me to bring my rod, and to try the Alpine lake at the four-thousand-foot level. Lakes that high, in a semi-glacial setting, are usually bereft of fish, owing mostly to the lakes' being frozen almost to the bottom each year, and the fact that The Maker didn't stock them with fish. I was dubious, but packed in a rod with my gun. Mid-August sun poured down on a little lake about a mile long, dammed at one end to provide water for a quarry operation four thousand feet below. The snow still clung in patches in the deep timber, although summer was almost over, and the amber water was cold as ice.

A big rise puddled the water ahead of me, whereat I made a record for setting up a two-piece rod, reel, and line. The very first cast hit the water in the mirror of the lake, at the spot at which the rise had occurred. I didn't even have time to take up the slack of my cast with the rod tip before the line jerked tight, the reel spun, and a fish broke water, dancing on its tail. Such a pretty fish I had never before seen. And a blazing fighter! That sixteen-inch beauty broke water with high jumps three times, then headed for the dark recesses of a sunken stump. The pull per ounce of fish was terrific. It stayed down, giving bursts

of long runs that would be a credit to any fish, and it battled even after I got it up on the beach, to pounce on it with legs, arms, and body. Examination brought to light the most beautiful fish I had yet seen, either in the tropical waters of Mexico or in the Alpine streams and lakes of Canada and Alaska. The top of the body was a dark humus brown, the sides coloring from blue-black through red to pure white. The body was semi-elongated, deep through in the midsection, slendering to a fast square tail, with heavy fighting shoulders just behind the rather small head. There is no more streamlined prize in the game-fish world, and certainly none so beautiful. The flesh when cleaned was a golden orange, tender and succulent, and so fat that no butter was needed in the pan to fry it. I had another reversal in my opinion of the fish called, loosely, char.

Later the Game Department identified the fish as Eastern brook trout, placed there experimentally some years ago so as not to have them infiltrate the streams which have been carefully reserved for our native trout. My opinions of such segregation were somewhat mixed. Such a fish would be an addition to any stream, but if the fighting qualities of the "brookies" were any example, it would seem possible that they might "whup" the true trout out of the country. Again, we do have the Dolly Varden char, and it doesn't seem to be guilty of much predation.

One September, I took off into the wilds of the Coastal Range after rainbow trout. It was on the Chilliwack River, a near estuary tributary of the famed Fraser River. Steelhead and rainbows were in our book for that trip. Many miles into the mountain torrents of the stream, we were quite disappointed in the results obtained from the pools. By accident or force of circumstances, I started to toss my lure into the very fast running rapids. The shock of a fish hitting my lure was immediate and alarming. The rod tip bent almost into the water; I tried to hold the rush of the fish heading downstream. I lost fifty yards of line on a hot reel drum so quickly that I thought I had a ten-pound steelhead at the end of the hook. Scrambling downstream, I got to a deep pool and played the fish to the surface. It was with a great deal of surprise that my companion, Dr. Mike Mickelson,



and I identified it as a three-pound Dolly Varden char. The fish, now on shore after a rousing battle, was lean and bright in color, almost indiscernible from a fresh-run trout from the sea. It was every bit as active as a cutthroat, and had lovely white flesh when cooked. We caught several "Dollies" weighing up to three pounds in that stream. All of them were in the fast snow-froth of rapids, not in the deep hollows of the pool bottoms, where one would expect to take them. Each was behind a boulder, and it was necessary to cast so that the lure swung with the current, just in behind the obstruction. They came out with a rush, and when hooked, all headed downstream, where the fight was toughest.

Moose hunting in the North, we were rowing to a bay some distance up François Lake. I tossed in a No. 3 Bear Valley spinner (my favorite all-round lure) and let it drift idly behind the boat. There was a terrific surge on the line, and the rod snapped down, almost breaking off in the water. Behind us there was a big disturbance in the shallow water, which caused me to think I had hooked a branch, turned it over, and perhaps it was now coming out of the water. There was another break just near it, and my line started to surge out with bulldog power behind it. I wound in the slack and felt a powerful rush that smacked the reel-winder against my knuckles as it broke my grip. The line kept surging out, with nary a ripple on the water. For twenty minutes the boys in the boat yelled at me to boat the fish, and to let them get to hell on with the moose hunting. I offered to let one of them boat the fish. He tried but he didn't want to let go when the other lad yelled for his turn. We forgot moose hunting entirely. Half an hour later, I had an eight-pound "gray trout" in the boat, after a real battle on a sixteen-pound-test line. That fish was a char, just as beautifully formed and colored as any trout, a prize much sought after by the tourists who inhabit the summer camps of Lake François. Some fishermen use steel handlines and go to great depths for char, others use rod and reel. I have heard many reports of twenty-pounders. Brother, what a battle that would be on a six-ounce rod with any tackle!

Concerning how to fish for char, I couldn't begin to tell all

## BOOK II : *Fishing*

the methods. Every locality has its own pet methods and theories. The simplest method is to use any of the well-known trout lures, flies, spinners, spoons, wobblers, cast bait, drifted worms, poppers, and plugs. All will take Dolly Varden or char. Too, I found in the Alpine Lake that an experiment with a small salamander brought me a big Eastern brookie in one cast. I had opened a fish to see what made it fat. The resulting find, several salamanders. Frogs too, I'm told, and even live or simulated mice will attract these fish. Choose your own bait.

Char can be had anywhere, in fast water, slow water, over shoals, deep out in the bay. They tend to stay closer to the bottom than trout, and are for this reason claimed by the self-opinionated to be ground feeders. It is only partly true. With "brookies" I found them near deep recesses, behind boulders, and under banks and snags in streams, whereas, in lakes, they were in deep and shallow water indiscriminately. Allowing the lure to sink a fraction of a second before the retrieve invariably produced more results than a lure drawn across the surface. In among the lily pads, at the estuary of an entering stream on a lake, the Dolly Vardens were invariably thickest. Also, I found the char more likely to take a spinner if it was baited with flesh, such as a worm, salamander, or even a grasshopper or beetle. This procedure often applies to the true trout family as well.

As to the tackle, any trout or bass tackle is char equipment. Use it in the same manner as you would for any gamester of the lakes and streams.

Depending on the time of the year, all fish are prone to having parasite worms and a muddy taste. The char no more or less than the aristocratic cutthroat or rainbow. There isn't any way I know that this can be avoided by the gourmet. If the fish are not prime, have your fun and release them. The dollar you pay for the meal without them is small discomfort. Or, if you find the fish muddy to the palate, try the streams having gravel bottoms. Anyway, you'll get the fight of your life out of a char, either in a lake or in a stream with a fast flowing water as a swell battle ground. Good luck, and try the char!

## 29 : Pike or Muskellunge



“AS RAPACIOUS AS a pike” is a phrase well coined, deservedly thrust upon the pike family as a whole, and although the purist will make proper distinctions between pike, pickerel, and muskellunge, they are all pikes. And this name should mean “battler.” They are of the family *Esocidae*, which has a single genus, *Esox* Linnaeus, one of the species being cosmopolitan, the other six confined to the North American Continent. We called them “jackfish” in the lakes of Alberta, but some of the colloquial and actual names are little gar, banded pickerel, little pickerel, grass pike, common Eastern pickerel, green pike, jack, Great Lakes pike, maskinonge, musky, muskallonge, picareau blanca, salmon pike, great Northern pike, and Chautauqua muskallonge. It doesn’t matter what you call them, they are fighters and they grow big enough to scare a man out of a boat. Ranging from about sixteen inches full grown to a reputed length of eight feet, they can weigh well over one hundred pounds, with thirty- and forty-pounders common in the muskellunge.

As the habits of both the common pike and the muskellunge pike are similar, and they cross into each other’s territory readily, it is my humble opinion that they should be lumped together. My wife, Thelma, bless her heart, is an Easterner, and has caught many muskellunge. She holds to the fact that a muskellunge is a muskellunge, and that a pike is nothing but a *fish*! So be it,

but I'll bet you a new hat and a big cigar that you or I can catch all pikes (including muskellunge) on the same tackle, with the same lure, and in the same type of water or habitat.

Anyway, I caught my first pike, or as we called them, jack-fish, when I was six years old, and only six inches taller than the pike. I say I caught the pike. My Dad always said the pike caught me, and perhaps it did. Dad, shortly after World War I, used to send us down to Lake Wabman in Alberta during the summer months, where one day, after much insistence on my part, I induced him to take both my chum and me out fishing with him. Two small six-year-olds are not the right formula for a relaxing day on a summer lake, particularly in a narrow-gutted, double-enders rowboat. Dad solved the problem by giving us two hastily rigged handlines to dangle at the stern while he rowed toward a tangle of rushes, which served as a back drop for his chosen casting spot.

I remember the sudden tug on the line, and being a pugnaciously-inclined brat I yanked back with a "You can't have my line, you darn ol' fish." The fish yanked back.

"Daddy, the fish is trying to take my line away," I yelled petulantly.

Dad was convulsed with laughter.

"Don't let him *take it* from you," he gurgled. "You keep it! It's yours."

There was a long annoyed lunge against the lure which turned me around and almost pulled me out of the boat. The line slipped in my fingers and began to burn away the tender flesh. I howled, and Dad got up to take the line from me.

"I can hold him, Dad. Lemme pull him in!" I said truculently, moving away from his hand. He relaxed back in his seat with a grim look on his face. The fish really began to fight.

"Help me, Dad! He's stealing my line," I yelled, as the big fish started away in earnest.

"Handle him yourself, you'll never learn a better lesson!" Dad refused and advised.

I was losing skin again and was really worried. I hauled in, and the fish hauled out. As yet I had not even seen it. I'll never

forget my reaction when I did get it to the side of the boat. I saw a big, greenish shadow in the water and yanked hard. That did it! The fish turned over on its side and the three-and-a-half-foot monster with the yellow underbelly and tremendous jaws looked like a big dragon or snake. I let go of the line with whoop of fright, allowing the fish to take its head. It soared out with a headlong rush. The line lopped over my wrist and the next thing I felt was the cold water hitting me in the face. I was literally being towed away from the boat as Dad reached over and grabbed me, blubbering from the water. He dumped me in the stern seat and, with sterner words that cut off my tears, he insisted I boat that fish.

About ten tremulous minutes later, I hauled the big monster into the boat while I crouched with my feet on the seat so that the big-toothed jaws couldn't bite me. My dad was laughingly proud of me when I carried the biggest fish of the day to the dock. It was almost as long as I was, the first North American game I ever took in my life.

But it's no good asking me how to fish for pike. I don't know very much about it. As a matter of fact, I have wondered at times how *not* to fish pike. The big devils will take any moving thing in the water, and I know one man who says he has used a brass doorknob, others who have just torn a chunk of shirt tail off to use as a lure, still others who have used squirrels' tails and silver paper off cigarette packages. I remember the lure rigged by a friend of mine which consisted of two thermos corks painted red and white and strung lengthwise on looped wire. His theory was that the lead weight took the line down deep, but the corks raised the leader up from the bottom at just the right height. Whatever the theory, the practice was fine, because he caught big pike. Actually I have seen many similar rustic lures used in the oceans to entice ling cod and rockfish, the former fish resembling the pike very much in habits and fighting quality.

A pike is not a showy fighter. He is a rod bender, not primarily a jumper or tail dancer. Pike will dash out of the water if snubbed short, or if they suddenly take the slack out of the line, and they are thus propelled to the surface. The very nature

of pike and muskellunge is to hit the lure or another fish with a Jack Dempsey-like haymaker that is intended to jar every bit of life out of a swimming creature. Woe to the fisherman who wraps a line around his finger or toe, then snoozes while the motor, or rower, of the boat cruises. There's no warning nibble. After the first two or three rushes, a pike sulks and heads for the reeds or some sunken snag. Pike seem to throw their heads down, just as a bronco throws its head up. The resultant weight on obstructed tackle often means a new rod, or at least a broken section.

Lures of all sorts will attract them, and funny things will happen. I remember once trolling unsuccessfully for over two hours with a lightly-weighted line and one of those light plugs that shovels its nose into the water, drawing itself down. Since I was rowing against the wind toward a reedy bay, I got puffed and stopped pulling on the oars. Knowing the lure would rise to the top, I didn't bother to reel in. Sure enough, the lure popped to the surface, and I just sat there watching it and thinking of the couple of followups I had had when I earlier had drawn the lure in. There had been pike standing off lazily two to four feet behind it, and they had taken a sullen swerve off to the side when the boat's stern came into view. In fact, I was thinking of that old saw about pike losing their teeth in the hot weather, wondering if there might be some truth to the silly idea. Maybe the pike were without teeth, but just couldn't resist following the lure in order to scare hell out of it.

Disgusted, I lifted my rod tip high, and reeled a half turn. The plug darted beneath the surface, and there was a heck of a yank. My fingers slipped off the reel, the line fairly soaring out. The pike just kept on going until I finally snubbed him down with my thumb on the reel drum. He put up a short battle, but I got him into the boat. He was hooked in the lower jaw only and his rushes had drowned him. I have seen this happen to many types of fish.

He had been following the lure for some time. Long enough to know it wasn't any food he recognized, smart enough to leave it alone, but too curious to stay away from it. He was caught by

his natural reflex actions, long directed at the movement of other fish. I have seen big fish lying close to the bottom, barely moving, suddenly spurt off after a flash from a minnow's belly. They seem to know that if they lie still, the normal swimming movement of the small fry will bring the latter out into the open, but that when they move around, the feeding minnows will seek shelter. Although they seem somnolent and disinterested, they are really very wide awake, with eyes on either side like big reflectors. They lunge at the movement in the water, and regardless of what it is, they hit the cause of the movement. Thus does the artificial lure attract all game fish. Few fish which follow a lure in will take it, in my opinion. They have to be startled into action by a quick movement, a sudden flash. That pike saw the sudden movement, forgot that he had identified it as driftwood, and hit it with all his natural predatory instinct.

We used a treble hook with a red and white feather duster that almost covered the hooks, and also brushed the reeds from the points. Sometimes this had a silver and red-and-white spinner attached just ahead of it, sometimes two spinners. It was a good lure and could be cast well or trolled. Some fishermen use wire leaders, some use catgut. I haven't tried nylon on these fish, but the pike family has maliciously sharp teeth and strong jaws, so the harder leader may be the better. Any of the trout or bass rods will hold the big chargers, but a fairly firm-acting tip will snap the lure quickly into the hard rushing jaw so as not to let the fish get a chance to open its big mouth in an effort to throw it.

The flesh is fairly firm, but not too good a keeper if the lake is warm. Putting a pike or muskellunge into refrigerator overnight seems to firm it up and bring out the juices in the fish. Some bird hunters swear that the pike and muskellunge are responsible for the decimation of downy ducklings in the early stages, and there have been verified reports that wild ducklings are found in the stomachs of the big fish. At any rate, the diet of the pike is varied enough that it is considered an excellent table fish. Next time you take one, try fileting it lengthwise, sprinkling it very lightly with flour, and frying it golden brown in a not too

BOOK II : *Fishing*

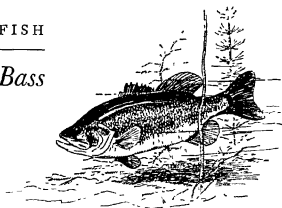
hot a pan, smeared with butter. You'll enjoy the next day of fishing thinking about the nice dinner you have ahead of you.



## GAME FISH

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### 30 : Bass



HOOKING into a bass in the mirror of a quiet back eddy on a clear stream is like unsuspectingly picking up the halter rope attached to a drowsing bronco instead of the loose end of your lariat. It is hard to believe that the dark, silent pocket into which you have just tossed your lure could hold so much imprisoned dynamite and still keep from bubbling over. And when you land the fish and see it on the bank or in the boat, you often think that the big one that must have grabbed it and put up the fight has let go. That small fish in front of you just doesn't seem to be the one that bent your rod double and made your line sing through the water until it was ready to snap. But it was a black bass, or as the ichthyologists term him, *Micropterus dolomieu* (smallmouth) or *Micropterus salmoides* (largemouth), of the family *Centrarchidae*, which includes basses, crappies, and sunfishes.

The range is large for these fish, smallmouthed bass being caught in their natural habitat from Lake Champlain westward to Manitoba in the north, and southward to South Carolina; while the largemouthed bass spreads even farther in range, from two thirds the way across Canada east to west, and down even into the depths of Mexico, being also abundant in Florida and Texas. (Incidentally, I prefer "largemouth" and "smallmouth" as designations.) The smallmouth, probably the better fighter of the two, is the smaller fish, ranging from half a pound to better

than five pounds, while the largemouth record is over fifteen pounds.

Strangely enough, I took my first scrapping smallmouth bass in the middle of the ocean tidewater of the Pacific Coast, entirely out of its natural range, and not more than forty miles from where the first black sea bass, a distant relative, came to my hook. Indeed, this incident may be one of the wonders of modern fishing. The British Columbia Game Department wanted to try the black sea bass in western waters, without endangering the life cycle of the salmon and trout. The smallmouth bass were, for this reason, planted in St. Mary's Lake on Salt Spring Island, a large island surrounded by the salt tide waters of the Gulf of Georgia. This fish with its inbred determination to win, survived and became almost too plentiful. My last bass was hooked in the center of the Central Mexican Plateau, at an altitude of thirty-five hundred feet, within twenty degrees of the equator, in the crater water of Lago Tequesquitengo. The fish in the tepid tropical lake hit with as much ferocity, fought with as much skywriting, and battled as long as the fish in the cold waters of the northern latitude. It all adds up to the fact that bass are a remarkable fish

As to catching bass *for sure*, there seems to be one never-miss solution, stay out all day and all night for six months, and take with you a sporting-goods store lineup of lures and every kind of insect, animal, and bird listed in zoology. If you don't catch bass at first, it isn't because they aren't around, or because you don't have what they want; for a bass will take anything, if it is of a mind to, and *nothing*, not even a diamond-studded fresh minnow, if it isn't of a mind to. This should illustrate my point. I tried wobblers, plugs, flies, and small frogs while crossing the United States from east to west, in streams abundantly supplied with smallmouth or bronze backs. By the time we arrived in Mexico I'd say "To hell with it." Bass could go climb a tree, as far as I was concerned. They even gave me the psychotic feeling that I was losing my grip as a fisherman. So when Jerry Breen of Mexico D. F. told me that the waters of Lago Tequesquitengo, beside which I was presently living, were full of five-pound bass,

I just snorted in disgust. Bass, pfooiel All the streams and lakes of North America were fished out! He suggested that I try catching some of the very small bluegills, or shiners, with a tiny hook, then impale them on a drop line and fish deep in the lake. That, Jerry told me, was the way to take the big lunkers.

It was one way I had not tried, and it appealed to me, the principal reason being that sitting on a surfboard out in the middle of the calm lake with my feet dangling in the water was a nice quiet way of spending the time in Mexico. I spent almost a whole day angling for small bluegills with a casting rod and floated worm. When I had ten bluegills of small size, Pancho, my gardener's boy, carefully dumped the bucket out in order to use it for carrying water to the banana palms. This, despite the fact that he had spent the whole day with me, loading the bucket and frying and eating the larger bluegills.

The next morning, I went down early to avoid complications, and while looking over the shallow water beyond the breakwater, I saw at least six big black bass skulking in the shadows of the weedy depths. They were five-pound bass if I ever saw any. Hastily, I backed into the shrubbery and put on a popper-type lure, specially designed in Mexico for Lago Tequesquitengo bass. Nary a nudge. I tried a silver spinner and worm. Same results. A wiggler, a black-and-white plug, a fly, a floated worm, a bluegill, salvaged from the night before, all followed in quick succession. No bass even took a look. Patiently I caught half a dozen bluegills, loaded myself, paddle, and jar of bluegills onto the surfboard, and headed for the center of the lake. That was where Jerry had said the bass bit on the drop lines with live bait. I had a good, four-hour snooze without even a nibble.

That week end, some American friends took me trolling in a boat that was driven so fast that I just couldn't see any bass taking the lure. Everyone said that the speed was right. We didn't get even a strike. I went out next week end with a German-Mexican friend who had lived on the lake for ten years. He rowed so fast that I thought he was afraid of being caught in a tornado. It was the right speed for bass, he said. No bass!

We tried casting into the bullrushes near the entrance of a

stream, we tried the stream itself. We tried minnows, plugs, worms, spinners, everything! I began to believe there were no bass in the lake. I tried, morning, noontime, evening, starlight.

One day, I was lazing by the shore on the surfboard when I saw two Mexicans in their birthday garb with ten smallmouth bass, two of them over five pounds. They had taken them with a spear, and they sold me the two big ones for ten pesos. I lied to my wife, but had a hard job explaining the holes in the center of the fish. The next day I went out with grim determination.

The stream mouth seemed to be the most logical place. I had a bamboo spear with a long lance at the end, as well as my rod. My first cast of a plug into the bullrushes took a two-pounder that felt like a whale. My next ten casts took nothing, not even a rise. I tied on a silver spinner with a worm. The screech of my reel almost started out the volunteer fire brigade two miles away.

It was a four-pounder!

He ran and jumped, danced on his tail, shook his head, and tried to dislodge the lure. He did everything in the book on that mirror-smooth water but stop and stand on his tail to take out the hook with his pectoral fins. He sulked under the surfboard, he slid me down the smooth wet surface, and finally he came in. I took six fish in about two hours, all between three and five pounds, and I caught each one on a *different lure*! As I paddled home, I passed over a school of bass that even to this day I don't believe was possible.

I had tired of paddling and was coasting on the silent, ripple-less movement with which only a surfboard can cruise. In the green water beneath me, just over a bare, gray patch of bottom, there were at least two hundred bass. They were swimming around the lake in the same direction that the board was traveling, ranging in size from ten to almost twenty inches long. These were bass the size of which I had heard but never believed were common. The school finned slowly over the bare spot, which, with the strong tropical sunlight overhead, acted like a reflector, showing the fish as clearly as if they were imprisoned in plastic. Every scale appeared as on a zoology chart, the eyes, the gill movements, the whisking of their tails as clear as day.

I eased a line, with a small bluegill swimming on it, down into the midst of them, and they parted in front of it like traffic around a cloverleaf, not one of them even interested in the tasty bait I had been told they could not resist. When my paddle bumped on the hollow surfboard, they disappeared so quickly that I thought I had been dreaming. I saw two hundred fish in the school. It could have been two thousand, for I could only see the ones that were passing over the light spot and a few in the murkiness of the surrounding bottom growth. Telling bass fishermen about this sight has an alarming effect. They either stare at me as if I were nuts, or if they are old bass fishermen they just nod patiently and agree with me.

The week immediately following this sight, the bass fishermen of Lago Tequesquitengo did well trolling or casting. I, among them, hooked bass on both troll and spinning reel.

Bass fishing is a complex subject, and I'm qualified only to relate my own experiences. When fishing a stream, I find that black bass will rise to any moving lure, from a dry fly to an impaled frog. Fly fishing is always the tough way for any fish, and probably the most sporting because of the tackle. For myself, I like the big, silverbodied bucktails that give flash and movement when fly fishing, but best of all I like plug and spinner casting. The short casting rod used for the latter practices will allow the bass fisherman to get into the recesses of the creeks where the growth is heavy and the potholes big. Bass like the shade of overhanging banks, big boulders, old waterlogged stumps, much like the char, Dolly Varden, and Eastern brook trout, all of which act very much alike when hooked. Usually, they will run for a deep hole or pocket, or try to get among the reeds, but once forced into open water, they will jump and cart-wheel in the air as much as any true trout. I have never yet had one take a long, sustained rush, which is common with steelhead or cutthroat, but the circling, tearing rushes and the tireless jumping on the surface give one an experience like trying to hold a wild pig with a rope while standing on a slippery floor.

I've found their mouths to be hard, and if the line and the rod will stand the weight, it seems best to snub them up short.

The principle reason behind this is the fact that they will head into the first pile of snags where they can get their heads. If they do wrap around snags you'll not only lose your lure and fish, but the broken part of the leader or line may snub a game fish down without hope of survival. Sixteen-pound-test line is more than heavy enough for the average, and even for the big bass if you want sport. While hand-lining takes a lot of them on heavier tackle, I'm not in favor of this type of trolling, although its enthusiasts claim that the fish has a greater chance of getting away, because they have hard mouths and sometimes grab the bait only in their jaws, without being hooked. Moreover with a handline, the fisherman doesn't have the resiliency of the rod to take up the terrific plunges that will often snap the line. One bit of advice about setting up your tackle: always put on a leader lighter in test than your line, a bit of knowledge that applies to all types of fishing, bass no less.

Lures? It is hard to say what a bass *won't* take. Some men swear only by live frogs, others pork rind, some say baby mice, and another fisherman I know says that baby ducklings are the bait for the lunker largemouths. I remember reading of a big bass with a duckling in its stomach, and also the same story in regard to pike and muskellunge. Who knows? It's hard to find ducklings anyway. But bass will take spinners, baited or plain, wobbler spoons, plugs, flies, worms, minnows, almost any cock-eyed invention from the fruitful minds of tackle inventors, and to boot they will also take smaller bass on a line. Like most game fish, they are cannibals.

In casting for bass, I have found them to be like trout in most respects. The bass will take fright at a sudden movement near the edge of still water. Where the pools run deep and smooth, it is better to stand just back of the bank, or well out of sight of where they are lying. In fast water, they will lie behind big boulders, but in my experience they do not stay in white-water rapids, as trout will, the bass seeming to prefer deep-pocketed pools and dark water. On the lake, they are caught in almost the same places as pike, trout and muskellunge, that is, near the reeds and in small bays where the small fry and minnows gather

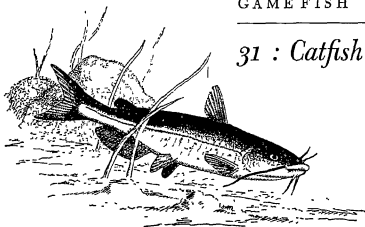
for shelter. Being killer-feeders, they don't often come to still or flesh bait. Move it, and they may strike out of pure fighting instinct.

For trolling, the best tackles are the artificial lures, as live bait soon drowns or washes out. I know men who say they have their best fishing when deep trolling in a lake, and have many fish to prove their theory, but for myself, the shallows, near to shore, are best. The reason: bass, like many fish, seem to come close to shore during late darkness, early morning hours, and again during late evening. Then, in the brightness of the day, they migrate back to the depths. My theory is that they feed during these shore hours on the small fry, then go back down to the dark depths to rest and digest the food. A deep-trolled lure may be dragging among the fish, but when they are in deep water, they are well fed and lazy, not liable to bite. However, if they haven't been filled up while close to shore, they will be tempted. But when you are trolling near shore, you are baiting where they naturally feed, and if they are there, they will be ready to strike. Taking an occasional turn out to the deep water and adding weight to your lure are good precautions, but not necessary. The minnows stay near shore. The bass have to come inshore for them. If you are there at that time, you'll get them—unless you happen to be at Lago Tequesquitengo!

Trout-type tackle is bass-type tackle, so little need be said about that question, except that you shouldn't take your best flyrod out and think you can manhandle a bass. Either the small-mouth or the largemouth bass will break it as quickly as a trout.

Somebody asked about the eating qualities of bass. They are scrumptious, white fleshed, flaky in texture, juicy, and they do well baked, fried, or steamed. As a matter of fact, a big bass split and stuffed with chicken-type dressing, then roasted in the oven, is a meal fit for a king. This is an old New Orleans trick with flounder, and it can kill you—from overeating. Like any other fish, bass achieve their best flavor in clear, fast water, and their worst in slow or still water with a muddy bottom. No further words of tribute I could pay the bass family would add to their name or fame. They are game fish.

31 : Catfish



WHEN a catfish was first mentioned in my presence, I thought someone was kidding me. My brother, who was visiting an outdoor camp, came home and told me that he was bitten on the nose by a catfish when drinking out of a little lake in the moonlight. Later I saw one in a window of a Greek restaurant which specialized in fish dinners. It was in a glass case, nosing morbidly against the windowpane, its Chinese-Mandarin whiskers hanging down in front of its wry mouth. No one could tell me that catfish were game fish. That is, not until I got my fist in a blue cat's mouth, while I was underwater in an Oklahoma river. Brother, that ten-pound catfish got itself a feed of man, and it went on down the river with a good chunk of my hand in its mouth.

There are over one thousand species of catfish in the world, mostly confined to the warmer latitudes. In Mexico and the United States, there are thirty species, the most important food and game fish coming under the genus *Ictalurus* Rafinesque, which includes the channel or spotted cats, blue or Mississippi cats, the genus *Ameiurus* Rafinesque, which includes Great Lakes cat, white or Potomac cat, yellow cat, bullpout, bullhead, horned pout; and the genus *Pilodictis* Rafinesque, which includes mud cats or goujon. It doesn't matter much what you call them, they are all catfish, all good eating, and ranging from a few ounces to over one hundred and fifty pounds.



Many years ago, while visiting a friend in Sacramento, California, I was presented with what he, a Mississippian, considered a delicious treat, a deep-fried catfish dinner. He went regularly to the Sacramento River, or some lake that emptied into it, and took catfish on a rod. At that time, I thought only of the fast-spurting trout and salmon as game fish, and although I had to admit the white, flaky flesh of the catfish was sweet and good, I couldn't bring myself to fish for them with him. I had read so much about the fish of cold waters being faster and more energetic that I believed it, and didn't think a catfish could provide any sport at all. I didn't know that a stream or ocean, so warm that it was friendly to the hand, could breed fish that would fight with all the vigor of cold-water northern fish. I learned as I grew older.

Catfish are classified according to the state you are in, one state having them as a game species, the next having them on all-year open season, no limit—a nuisance to anglers. But it seems universally accepted that blue or Mississippi and the channel cats are the best fighters. From what I have seen of them, I'd say it was so. The blue and the channel or spotted cat inhabit the faster flowing, clear-water streams, and a big one on a light pole or rod with reel will give the angler a taste of sport.

Brought up on the sea, and having lived near it most of my life, I can't get away from water for long without a feeling of vacuum in my soul. After a couple of weeks confined to classes at the University of Oklahoma, in Norman, I felt one day that I'd bust wide open if I didn't see some water. I hopped into my car after class and headed for the Canadian River, a stream near by. Stopping the car at the entrance to the bridge, I went along the catwalk until I could peer down at the then flooding waters. It gave me some relief.

Watching the almost blood-red tide sweep against piers of the bridge, I got the shine of a casting rod flicking a short distance away. It gave me a jelly feeling in my innards. It didn't seem possible, in that roiling, mud-swilled torrent of water, that there would be any kind of fish. Hurrying down the approach to the piling of the bridge, I saw a man's head bobbing through the

bushes. When I got to the edge of the stream, he had sat down on the muddy bank and picked up his rod.

"Fishin' any good?" I asked him

"Catfishin' 's always good, friend," he said eying me with a calculating but friendly glance. "You from out of the state? Mebbe a Yankee."

"I'm from Canada," I told him. "I've never fished down here. We don't have catfish out West."

"Then, son," he said sorrowfully, "You ain't fished at all *yet*. Jist you watch that dang rod over there. I been hopin' someone'd come down here. Got me two rods, 'n I don't never have enough nerve to leave one o' them home. Seems right unfriendly, after you've had a rod a long time, t' leave it for a new one. Anyway, son, I kin tell you like fishin'. You go get yourself a cat on that 'n. I'll tend this 'n."

I looked at the split-cane fly rod propped up in the mud of the bank and thought, "What a shame! A lovely, light fly rod, built especially for trout, stuck in the mud of a riverbank *for catfish*." Picking the rod up with a nod of thanks, I felt a quiver of expectancy go through me. I took out my handkerchief and began wiping the mud off the butt. My friend and benefactor looked over at me curiously.

"You doin' that fr luck?" he asked seriously. "Polishin' the end o' that rod?"

Embarrassed at my action, I nodded.

"Beats all hell," he grinned amiably, "what a guy will do to catch a catfish."

The smile stayed on his face as he glanced sheepishly out at the red torrents swilling past. Turning his face back to me, he had a boyish look on his sixty-year-old, leathery features. He stroked his chin in embarrassment.

"Know what I do, son?" he asked suddenly.

"No," I grinned back at him. "What?"

"I sneak outa the house *without kissin' my wife, Mamie*," he confessed unhappily. "Seems like ever' time I kiss her, 'fore going catfishin', I get skunked! Take today, I didn't kiss her. Got six o' them in that flour sack beneath you." He pointed to

the bank below me, where a submerged hundred-pound flour sack swung in the current.

"Well, I'll be darned," I said admiringly, and then added a lie. "Seems like polishing the butt of my rod always gets me fish."

My hand scrubbed vigorously on the butt. Suddenly the butt scrubbed vigorously on my hand. The tip of the rod arched to the swollen river, the reel grinding on the ratchet with a scream.

"Handle 'm slow, son," advised the old fellow. "He's a big one, to bend that rod like that. Handle 'm slow!"

That fighting cat didn't want to be handled slow. He wanted to go hell-bent-for-election downstream, and he felt to me as if he was forty pounds heavy. I ground slowly on the reel, and every once in a while the fish would hit for the fast water, with a pull that rapped my knuckles with the reel winder. Finally I got him into the backwash from the bridge pillar, where he sulked and jerked as I dragged him to the bank. I reached down quickly to grab him, and like a scared rabbit he headed into the current again. The look I had at him made me judge his weight at ten pounds.

"Don't," admonished my friend, "ever reach for a catfish fast. It startles 'em. Jest ease 'em up slow 'n easy like. Then raise 'em up slow."

With his help I landed the catfish, a twelve-pound blue cat, a prize, he told me. We caught six more together that afternoon, and I remember one of his remarks very plainly

"You ain't ever gonna find anythin'," he said, "that a catfish won't eat, from laundry soap to old shoe buttons. Me, I like good stunkn' chicken liver best. Smell brings 'em around, to my mind. Some use old cheese"

The old man was right. Catfish will take almost anything that shines or smells. They are like halibut, cod, flounders, sculpin, and sturgeon, ground feeders. Like the sturgeon, which produces caviar, the catfish has white, flaky meat, and plenty of it, so what it feeds upon best is of interest to the angler. It is also a predator, feeding on the flesh of other fish, minnows, and even other catfish. In fact, where the big goujon, or mud cat, is

fished extensively in Kentucky, the small blue cat is used as live bait to take him.

Hickory shad, mooneys, skipjacks and crawfish are good, cut or whole bait, and all that is necessary to catch them is to put a thumbnail-size, or larger, wad of bait on a single hook, with any leader, any weight, and toss it into the flow of the stream, or over the side of a boat or pier on a lake. Catfish will find the bait *if they are around*. Trot lines are used extensively, but actually they are more used commercially than for sport. Reaching up to a mile in length, if the water is suitable, a trot line is nothing more than a heavy cord, with leaders set about eighteen inches to two feet apart, a baited hook to complete each set.

There is another practice called "jugging," which is done by attaching short lines to floats that up-end when a cat takes the bait. This is more a rowing exercise than fishing, chasing the cans or floats as the big fish go swimming off. But, of all the sports (and I do mean *sports*) that I have engaged in, I'd say "noodling" is the whammiest and most dangerous. What a man lacks in brains, he has to have in guts, if he is going to engage in such a pastime. Banned by law in some states, it is to my mind the most sporting method of fishing there is.

All a man needs is his own hide, fairly intact, not even clothes, but some take the precaution of carrying a short piece of rope, others attach a hook to the rope, and still others use cargo, or stevedore hooks. When Jim Welden, who lived in the same boarding establishment that I did at the University of Oklahoma, told me about catching catfish with his bare hands, I thought he was giving me a real ride down the tall-tale road.

With a good excuse for going with him and Pete hidden in the back of my mind, should the trip turn out to be a joke on me, I drove them a hundred miles or so back into the hills.

After a big flapjack breakfast, Pete's mother wished me a kindly goodbye and said, "You be careful of these boys, Mike. They're a little wild at times."

Down at the murky river, I stripped off all but my jeans and canvas shoes, as I saw Jim and Pete strip to their shorts and plunge into the river. I kept my jeans and shoes on because I

didn't want to bark my shins and feet on the logs, stones, and debris in the river. It was a good thing, as I was to find out later. We were to be in the water for six hours, swimming, diving, fighting currents and log jams, and dodging snapping turtles, bank beavers and cottonmouths. In case you don't know what a cottonmouth is, I may explain it is a very deadly big snake, common to Southern waterways. And there are lots of them. We saw several.

Jim and Pete were in the murky water of the river, down at a cutbank, where the water swirled with great force. Jim put his hand on Pete's head and shoved him under. I thought it was horseplay until I saw the serious look on Jim's face. His shoulder muscles were flexed and taut, his lips pressed in a grim line. I saw Pete's struggling white body fighting the torrent beneath us.

"Jesus, Jim," I said, "Let him up. You'll drown him."

Instead he gritted through closed teeth, "Help me hold him down, Mike. Hold him. I'm losing my hold."

Suddenly, the full force of the current swerved to our side of the channel and I went under, kicking and sprawling, scraping my back on the jagged channels of the river bottom as I was pulled by the ripping current. Bursting with compressed air, my lungs felt as if they would cave in before I got to the surface. About thirty feet downstream I climbed to the bank. I crawled out bedraggled and half-drowned. Jim and Pete were laughing fit to be tied.

"S'matter, Mike?" Jim grinned from his good-humored face, "These Southern streams too tough for a Northerner?"

"You guys!" I gasped. "What the hell are you doing to each other, trying to drown yourselves?"

"Hell, no," said Pete, "I was in a hole with a big blue cat. See what the sonuvagun did?"

He held up his right hand. Red blood was surging down his wrist into the water. But he had a grin on his face. I looked with amazement at his hand. There were slashed deep cuts all over the tough palm, the back of his wrist was a mess of fine slashes and it looked as if he had just shoved it into a meat grinder.

"For Godsakes!" I exclaimed. "You guys were really serious."

Pete and Jim looked at me unbelievably.

"You mean," said Pete, "you drove a couple of hundred miles just to find out if you were being kidded about noodling?"

Jim grinned at him.

"Pete," he said, "you just don't know how hard-headed these Canucks are. Almost pig-headed enough to catch a catfish with his bare hands. Want some disinfectant on that mauler of yours? He sure gave you a going over. Sorry I couldn't hold you down."

"I just about had enough," laughed Pete. "Must have been about fifteen pounds I had him right to the surface. Did you see him?"

Jim pursed his lips sagely.

"Not over ten or twelve pounds," he said. "Female, ready to spawn. They're cranky as hell."

Pete didn't say anything, but I could see him arguing it out in his mind. For myself, I didn't think anything less than a fifty-pound lynx could have mauled Pete's hand like that.

Pete and Jim decided to work up the river, but first of all, Jim decided I should see the "hole" in which the catfish had been. I would be able to judge from it, what to look for along the banks.

"Are there any catfish in there now?" I asked cagily, looking at Pete.

"Hell," he said seriously, "do you think we'd be standing here if there was?"

"You're sure?" I said, and saw the dejected look in his eyes for my answer.

Jim said, "No, Mike, he got away."

"Okay," I agreed, "hold me down."

Jim and Pete put their total strength of three hundred and seventy-five pounds on the back of my neck, and I went down, down, down. At about five feet under water the clayish bank fell away to a slender ledge. Feeling along the ledge, my hand suddenly went out into open water through a ten-inch hole. I jerked it out and forced myself to the surface.

"S'matter, Mike?" asked Jim curiously, "Did the catfish go back in there?"

"No. I ran out of breath," I lied.

I could have added that I'd run out of guts, too, but it didn't seem appropriate right then to admit it.

I followed Jim and Pete up the river. Every once in a while they'd combine in efforts over a hole. When they had decided the pocket was empty I'd go up to it, dive under and feel gingerly in the hole, praying to God there wasn't a catfish in one of them. The holes were strange to me. They looked and felt as if they had been dug out inside with a short mining pick, running from four inches in diameter to holes you could get your whole head and shoulders into. Past the small entrance, the pockets broadened out like hidden tombs, some of them having two or three pockets as offshoots from the main chamber. Although the top and sides were rough conglomerate sandstone and gravel, the bottoms of some of them were nested over with fine, soft sand.

I asked Jim about that.

"Well, Mike," he informed me, "if the bottom is sort of rough, sandy, or gritty, with twigs or stones in it, you can figure there won't be a cat in it. But, if you put your hand into a hole, and the bottom is soft and silky feeling, close it up quick. There is likely a cat in there. I don't know if they dig these holes themselves, but some say they do with their nose, and once inside they just keep wearing the walls away with the movement of their tails and fins. Some guys dig the holes for them with post-hole shovels. You get up on the bank." He pointed to a pitted clay wall just above the water, "And look in those holes. They'll show you what I mean."

I looked up at the bank, got out, and examined the several holes that had been made during high water. There was no question that the catfish had actually dug them out. There was a narrow orifice which quickly broadened out into a chamber, and the earth was just as hard at the spots where they had been dug as it was in any other part of the bank.

I slipped back into the water, which had become invitingly warm, compared to the coarse breeze that was blowing. I saw Jim come to the surface and struggle with his face half sub-

merged, gasping, but not saying anything. Pete must have heard the gasp, for he plunged racing style across the river towards him.

"Hold him, Jim!" he yelled fiercely, "hold him!"

By the time I got over to the other bank, Pete was underwater with Jim's foot on his neck. Jim yelled at me to get my feet in the hole's mouth and keep them there. I did so with trepidation. The hole was at least a two-foot entrance, opening into what felt like the Carlsbad Caverns.

"A real big one," gritted Jim, "in there. He struck me the minute I got a hand in. He didn't come out, though. The hole goes back about six feet. Could hold a hundred-pounder. Hope Pete gets at him. Here he comes! Block that hole!"

Pete gasped for breath before he could speak. He had been down all of two minutes and I'd been wondering if he would ever come up.

"He's at least a thirty or forty pounder," he gasped gleefully. "I couldn't get my hand into his mouth. Kept backing away. That's a big hole, Jim. Gimme the rope. I'll go after him."

Jim demurred.

"I'll get him, Pete," he offered, "you got your mauling for the day. Come on you guys, hold me down."

Now I realized what the big piece of clothesline was for. Jim was going to go down, insert the rope through the fish's gills and try to pull him out. It didn't make sense to me. A big forty-pound fish lying in a hole, allowing a man to stick a rope through his gills in order to pull him out. It wasn't done, even by catfish! When we pushed Jim under and held him down with our feet on the back of his shoulders and neck, I realized why Jim was fighting a battle underwater that was as quick and vicious as a boxing match.

He came up with blood streaming from both his hands, a glint of battle in his eye. Pete went down and we held him. He came up with an empty rope.

"I'll go down," I offered, scared stiff.

"No, Mike," said Jim generously. "You might lose him, or he might drown you. You better start on a little one. That sonuva-



bitch has got a bit of Welden blood in him now. And I aim to get it back, by eatin' him. Hold me down."

It seemed like an hour he was under, and his struggles were getting slower and weaker.

"Pete," I said anxiously, "Mebbe we'd better pull him out of there. The cat may have drowned him."

Pete gritted his teeth and I heard the sand crush in his bicusps. The muscles on his shoulders were swelled like lumps as he gripped at the roots in the bank.

"Jim's fished catfish before, Mike," he said. "Let him holler if he wants to let go."

Holler! How the hell could a guy holler under six feet of water, half way into a subterranean cave? Particularly if a forty-, or maybe eighty-pound, catfish had his head in his mouth. I strained to keep Jim under. Suddenly he wiggled free of our feet and burst to the surface. He gasped for air and went down again without saying a word.

"See," acknowledged Pete, "he's still breathing."

There was a hell of a commotion underfoot, and Jim seemed to sail away as if on an express train. I saw him hit the surface of the pool about thirty feet away, let out a whoop and go down again.

"Come on, Mike!" yelled Pete. But he didn't need to. I was trailing Jim with every ounce of crawl stroke there was in me. We finally got hold of Jim about a hundred yards downstream. He was laughing and holding on for dear life to a taut rope.

"Forty pounder, Pete," he laughed jubilantly. "Rode the bastard right to the bottom and he damn near conked me on some of those big snags. Got a slip knot through his gills and he doesn't like it. Come on. Let's get him on the bank. Yellow cat, I think."

Three of us got out on a slippery clay shelf and pulled on that rope, and the cat damn near pulled us off the narrow ledge. On the shore it lay docilely enough, until I touched it, and with a tremendous flip it went back into the water.

"Sensitive," said Jim, as he yanked the line back. "One reason I never take the line off them."

The fish later went thirty-eight pounds on the scales.

A couple of miles up the river, Pete led me up a smaller stream, in which he had taken some big cats out of hollow logs. I saw something slip into a big pool.

"What was that, Pete?" I asked.

"Couple of snapping turtles," he said casually. "We'd better leave this pool alone. Almost lost my thumb to one of them when I was first noodling."

A few minutes later he pulled out a six-pound blue cat from a hole in the bank.

"Another one in there, Mike," he gasped. "Like to get him."

I tried to appear eager. Pete pushed me under, and I put my cotton-gloved hand in. (Yes, I'd borrowed a pair for just such an occasion, from Pete's mother, before I left.) Reaching in the hole, something hit my wrist like a mad bulldog. I felt the skin tear off, and thought, "What the hell, I've lost skin now. I'll get it back." I got my hand in the fish's jaws and felt the needle-like teeth go through the glove. Holding on for dear life, I yanked at the fish and finally got him to the surface before I drowned. Pete smiled.

"Not bad, for a first one," he applauded. "Maybe five pounds."

It had seemed like a hundred-pound fish to me, while I was under water.

Farther up the stream, we by-passed a shallow pool off to the side of the main channel. Something came down off the bank with the speed of an arrow. Pete stopped. I saw the thing speed through the water with a trail like a motor boat, dive and come up on the shore near us, spin off like a darting fish, hit the bank and slither up two feet. It pierced the water again with a hissing sound, hit the top like a fish on a line, and shot into a tangle of branches

"What was that?" I yelled.

"A cottonmouth or copperhead," said Pete calmly.

"You mean that they're around here?" I squealed. "And, they can travel *that fast*?"

"They have to be fast enough to catch fish while they're swimming," acknowledged Pete. "I remember one time I was

fast into a cat in a hole near the top of the bank. When I put my head up, a cottonmouth was on the edge of the bank, about ten inches from my face, looking right into my eyes."

"What'd you do?" I asked.

"I just went under again and prayed he'd go away."

"Did he?"

"About the third time I came up," Pete said.

"Why didn't you get the hell out?" I queried.

"And lose a twenty-pound catfish!" snorted Pete.

We had been in the water about six hours. We had six catfish and had lost four. Pete and Jim were having a smoke on the side of the bank. I was so dead tired I just lay back, wishing to God I was home in bed. I looked up at the crunch of footsteps in the gravel. A fellow about five feet ten, rangy in build, springy of step, came down the bank.

"I heard you guys was noodlin'," he said quietly. "How's it goin'? Any cats around?"

Jim pointed to the flour sack and told the newcomer we had six. The man went over and looked at them, a glint growing in his eye. He turned to Pete.

"Your old man gimme the afternoon off," he stated. "Guess I wasn't any good to him after he told me. He shouldn't a' told me you was noodlin'."

Pete grinned at him. Later he whispered to me.

"That's Ed," he said. "Best damn noodler in the state. Watch him go."

I never saw a man quite like Ed. He was about one hundred and sixty pounds of sinewy dynamite. In the water he moved like an eel, and the only thing he wore in that log-infested, sharp-branch-and-rock-strewn water was a constant grin. He pulled catfish out of places you wouldn't believe a man could do it.

On a piece of sandy shoal about ten feet square, I saw him standing stark naked. Jim, Pete, and I clambered up on the shoal near the opposite end from a pile of drifted dead-tree branches.

"Gimme that broomstick," said Ed.

I handed him the long stick with the small hook in the end that he had brought with him for probing the very deep holes.

Wondering what he wanted it for, I saw him move slowly toward the end of the ten-foot island on which the four of us stood. None of us but me had anything covering our legs, and the only thing Jim and Pete had on were soggy T-shirts in order to ward off sunburned shoulders. No shorts, no shoes, Ed was stark naked. I saw him moving toward the brush.

"Look 'a the bastard," he snarled.

"My God!" I yelled.

Coiled in a sandy spot among the branches, not ten feet away on the small island, was a moccasin *as thick as my wrist*. I felt the hair on the back of my neck stand on end in fright.

"You leave that goddam thing alone!" I yelled.

Ed looked at me in surprise, fondling the broomstick in his hand. I saw his eyes judging my worth.

"You leave that damn thing alone," I said slightly less agitated. "He isn't bothering us. There's four of us on this sand, if you miss him."

Ed looked at Pete and Jim. They said nothing but looked awfully tense. Finally Ed backed away from the four-foot monster, which had reared its ugly head and opened its white-lined mouth. Looking into that maw, I felt as if it was as big as the mouth of a hippopotamus. Ed didn't say anything more, just walked passed the big snake, about four feet away, and plunged into the water. About thirty-feet away, he plunged under water and came up with a catfish. He swam like an eel to the bank on which I was standing, tossed the cat out, and swam back again. Seconds after he was under, he rose to the top again, swimming with only his feet, the catfish held out in front of him like the bow of a boat. He tossed it out on the bank with an agility I'd never seen in a man. He looked up at me quizzically.

"You afraid of cottonmouths?" he asked.

"You goddam right I am," I agreed, "But not *men*."

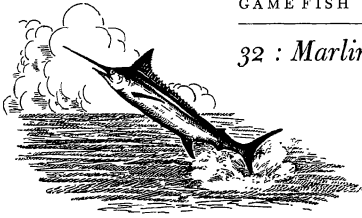
He laughed merrily.

"Jim told me," he said, "you wasn't afraid of nobody. Hell, cottonmouths ain't so smart. I killed lots of 'em. Come on. I'll show you how to noodle. Maybe we'll find a cottonmouth in one of them holes."

Well, that is noodling for catfish. I've faced charging bear, mistachy, ornery moose, cougars spitting in trees, rattlers while wearing high shoes, and angry women, but I go all out when I say that noodling for catfish among cottonmouths, bank beavers, snapping turtles, and blue cats, feeling around in holes that could drown you, if your arm jammed for a couple of minutes, is just as dangerous, if not more dangerous than facing a grizzly bear.

So, if you want to go catfishing, first find a river, stream, or lake in which cats abound, and take your choice. A catfish on a light line and rod and reel is real sport, but noodling one is the essence of sports. If you think it's easy, go down to the river some day, strip your clothes off, dive in, and find yourself a hole in the bank. But, before you do, pay up your insurance and put a down payment on a hole in the ground for yourself—just in case they do find your body.

32 : *Marlin*



THE MARLIN is like the tiger of India and the lion of Africa, it isn't the biggest game in the world, but it is one of the toughest. When you have sweated and heaved until your shoulders and neck feel as if you've been in a wrestling-boxing match combined, your wrists feel numbed and jellied from winding, and the glare of the sun-drenched sea has glazed your eyes, you will wonder just why you ever wanted to land such a fish. But bring the marlin alongside the boat, the whole eight to thirteen feet of amazing fighting fish, and you will suddenly want to start on your next one! Any marlin is an exciting catch, small or large; and by comparison with other fish, even a small one feels like a whale.

There are several recognized species of marlin, all of the swordfish group, as is the sailfish. Blue marlin, white marlin, silver marlin, striped marlin and black marlin. The record black marlin weighed 976 pounds, was twelve feet, eight inches long, caught in the Bay of Islands, New Zealand, by Laurie Mitchell, while the longest striped marlin went thirteen feet, five inches, weighed 692 pounds, and was caught off Balboa, California, by A. Hamann. The record blue marlin was twelve feet, ten inches, 742 pounds, caught off the coast of Bimini, British West Indies, by Aksel Wichfeld. It will give you an idea of what an average 150-pound fisherman has to do with a rod and reel to catch and hold so much concentrated dynamite.

Common to both the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, the marlin is a fish, the taking of which has caused men to admit that making a million dollars was a tame experience by comparison. Unfortunately, the marlin is like caviar, it is not often the fate of the humble fisherman to enjoy it. I didn't get mine until after making a bull-headed decision that I'd take anything in the way of guff to get my chance at it. As it happened, I did take it easily, through the generosity of Norman S. Neyland of Long Beach, California. That is, the opportunity to get the fish was made easy, but the landing of it was one of the toughest struggles I ever had.

My wife knew my taste of sailfishing had so swelled my enthusiasm for big-game fishing that she laughed and said she would quietly stay at Lago Tequesquitengo for a couple of weeks while I went over to Guaymas, on the Pacific Coast. When I arrived, I went down to the jetty where the charter boats tied up for weighing, and watched the fish come in and be weighed. Two regular Mexican charters came in, and one boat had a 310-pound marlin on it, which made my eyes bug out. The other boat had a 250-pound fish, and a *smaller* marlin of 180 pounds. The marlin fishing, I was told, was excellent, both boats having had at least five fish after their teasers, and both had struck and lost fish.

There was a pretty and vulnerable-looking blonde standing beside one of the fish on the dock, and her camera was being badly mishandled by her rather inebriated companion. She was getting a little droopy in the smile and bust from trying to tell him how she wanted the shot taken, while watching him weave around the dock trying to get both himself and the camera into focus at the same time. In fact, she was getting a little short tempered and looked at me invitingly a couple of times. Realizing that I was past my prime and would not be the reason for such a smile, I kindly offered to take the picture. Her companion agreed without a moment's hesitation, and tried to get his arm around both the blonde and the marlin at the same time. Either way he would have had an armful, but anyway I got the picture. There followed an invitation to have a drink, which, Irishman

that I am, I considered seriously before finally accepting. After all, these people were strangers, and what I had come for was an unbattled marlin, not a martini.

But one drink led to another, and after a thoroughly salubrious time and the arrival of nightfall, Norm Leyland and his wife came into the cantina. He was going out marlin fishing on the following day, and asked me if I'd like to join his party. The only thing to do was to tell Norm that I wanted to go out, and that I probably wouldn't have done so alone, with only a boatman. Yes, I'd gladly go along and watch. He grinned in a nice way and said Mrs. Leyland had been looking for an excuse to miss the day of marlin fishing and was only accompanying him out of wifely duty. I could have kissed her. It's no good fishing solo for big ones.

I met Norm at the jetty the following morning after tossing restlessly in a flea-bag Mexican hotel all night. My hands were shaking as I saw him come down the wharf bright as a new dollar. He grinned and asked me if I'd ever taken a marlin. I admitted that sailfish had been my only big-game fish. He smiled

"You'll see something, Mike," he said, "if we're lucky. Angelo is a good skipper. He knows where the marlin are. Let's go."

Looking back at that beautiful ridge of mountains, across a slightly restless blue sea a couple of hours later, the full impact of the loveliness of Guaymas hit me. The slight breeze on the water was just enough to dry the body and keep one cool. The sharp colors of the mountains seemed like a painted fan laid upon silken blue velvet. It was enough, even if we didn't hit our marlin. But we did!

Norm had been out for several years in a row. He saw the two marlin tails about two hundred yards away, even before the skipper did. The boat swung all too slowly toward them for my excitement. As our mullets skipped in front of the two fish, they both disappeared suddenly, and I got a sick feeling in my stomach. My bait immediately flipped out of the water, but the clothespin failed to release. I shook inside with a cold feeling in my belly. The next thing I saw was Norm's line flip off the outrigger and the slack fall into the water. He sat up suddenly.



Norm is probably the most unruffled guy I know. He turned to me and said:

"Please light me a cigarette, Mike, will you?"

Then, with a swift upward toss, he hit the slack in the line. Almost immediately two hundred and fifty pounds of fighting, slashing marlin smashed out of the blue green. It stood on its tail on a cotton-batting-like pillow of pure froth for what seemed like minutes to my eyes. Then down it went into the depths, to shoot out like an arrow not fifty feet away, landing on its side and rising again. Then it started to run. At what seemed to be a quarter of a mile away, in a circle from the boat, the fish went into a series of flashing jumps, as Norm tried desperately to take the belly out of the line before the fish ran again, but the line took up slack under its own resistance to the water.

For two hours I watched that fish fight. How many times it hit for the great blue out yonder in the sky, I don't know. Each time it went up, I squealed with delight, and I was hoarse when it came alongside. As the skipper took the leader and brought the fish up to club it, Norm said quietly for him to release it. The words shook me down to my boots.

"I'm trying for a four-hundred-pounder, Mike," he said casually. "That one is only about two hundred and fifty."

Brother! What a sportsman!

For two hours we trolled without much excitement. I took a couple of dolphins and had the time of my life with them. The energy of this South-Seas fish always took me by surprise. About three hours after Norm's battle, there seemed to be marlin almost everywhere. I saw two of them jump clear of the water and come down with a crash; one only fifty feet from the boat. Then we began to see the reason for the appearance of the marlin. The water was full of what looked to me to be herring. I forget the Mexican name for them.

A big marlin nosed up to Norm's bait, smacked it, and went over to mine. It hit the bait with a slash of its sword, and I heard Norm speak coolly.

"Drop back, Mike. Drop back. Don't strike"

I saw him reeling in out of the corner of my eye.

"Now, strike!" he said.

I did. The line came back as loose as an empty clothesline. I shook inside with disappointment and anxiety. I dropped back without thinking. The bait smacked up into the air. Norm spoke calmly again.

"Draw it up toward you. He's coming in," he instructed. "Tease him until he's mad enough to hit hard."

I tried a feeble grin. Who the hell was teasing *who*? My toenails were chewing pieces out of the deck in agonized anticipation. I drew back. The marlin shot forward like an express train. I let the fish bait back and he hit it again.

"Keep it out of his reach," said Norm sternly.

I gritted my teeth and prayed. It was the hardest thing I ever did in fishing, to let that marlin dash up and then pull the bait away from him. I did it four times, and each time he came up more quickly and angrier, slashing the top of the water with his big tail, creating a pool of froth behind him.

"Let him have it, Mike," stated Norm softly.

The marlin was coming in where we could see him very plainly with his mouth wide open. I shook as I let the fish drop back. He got it right down his throat and I jerked with all my might as his bill came down in the water. The bait fish flew out of the water and I thought my hook had come loose until I was yanked almost over the gun's by the terrific surge of unleashed power. It felt like trying to hold onto a fast express with a rotten piece of clothesline that you knew was going to break any second, but was going to drag you a hundred yards before it did. The rod tip went down, and the reel whined like a falling howitzer shell. Down, down, and down, deeper than I thought a fish could go, the marlin went. Four hundred yards of line sang off the almost bare spool, and abruptly it stopped the heavy pull. About a hundred yards away I saw a big gray-blue fish smash out of the water and start to tail-walk toward the boat. I didn't recognize it as my own marlin.

"He changed his mind about sounding, Mike," smiled Norm. "Get that belly out of your line as quickly as you can."

I was already winding the line up from bottom as quickly

as I could, having recognized what had happened. It seemed funny to be pulling line that felt almost loose clear from the bottom, especially when the fish I was fighting was dashing along the top of the water on his tail. Suddenly the line hit the tension between the marlin and me and the battle was on in earnest. The fish was a tail-walker type, according to Norm. He said he would tire himself out trying to throw the hook on the top of the water. Well, maybe. At the end of two hours the skipper could have hit me on the head with a club, and I don't think I'd have felt it any more than the marlin did. He came alongside and there was a whoop from Norm.

"Over three hundred pounds, Mike," he said by way of congratulations. "Bet it beats my three-hundred-and-twenty-five-pounder."

I looked down at the big fish with a feeling akin to that which I have experienced after a hard fist fight, and I had licked a guy I liked, and shouldn't have beaten. My impulse was to let him go. Angelo, the skipper of the boat, tightened the leader. He smacked the billy on the brave head, in almost the same movement as he grabbed the big bill. There was a last thunderous splashing at the stern of the boat, and I saw the muscles of Angelo bulge like balloons suddenly blown up. He smashed the billy again and again on the head and yelled to the boatman for help.

Norm looked up at me with a deep look.

"He wants something to show at the wharf, when we get in," he explained. "It is good advertising. Anyway, Mike, he is too big to let go for your first one."

As I said before, Norm Leyland is one of the nicest guys I ever met. He had read my feelings. On the way back I felt the ache of my shoulders as I looked at the big fish in the cockpit, and it matched the one in my heart. The marlin weighed three hundred and nine pounds and was one of the highest fish for the month, no world-beater, but in my record book the gallant champion of all my fishing days.

I don't know how to fish marlin, because I only caught one, and that was with the coolest guidance in the world from Norm.

Mrs. Leyland thanked me for taking Norm out and made a fuss over my fish. I just hung my head, because I was still not a little sorry about the death of that great fish. My advice to you is to find a companion like Norm Leyland who has caught many marlin, and listen to him, and watch his every action. It will be hard to do, but most of the charter-boat skippers will rig you, guide you, and advise you, and in a big game-fish paradise like Guaymas, you can learn a lot in your first day just by listening to conversations. Almost every one who goes there does so with marlin and sailfish in mind.

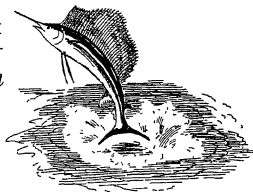
Here's to your hanging—of a marlin, I mean!

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GAME FISH

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33 : *Sailfish*



THERE IS, OBVIOUSLY, no greater thrill for a fisherman than taking his first marlin, but the sailfish is not far behind. The fighting qualities are excellent in the sailfish, and no more respectful salute is given than when a fisherman nods to a released sailfish after the battle is over. The memory of that beautiful blue fish, with his spotted, iridescent blue standard which people call his sail, and his rapier of a bill, is like nothing so much as the recollection of tales of medieval jousting, with charging horses, flowing robes, and set lances. Courage, determination, speed, ferocity stick in your mind as you think of the stupendous, reckless battler, dancing, jumping, burning the line off your drum. Caught in both the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans, the sailfish reaches its largest proportions in the western ocean, where it has exceeded two hundred pounds and ten feet in length. The record Atlantic sailfish taken by rod and reel weighed 123 pounds, and the Pacific sailfish, 221 pounds, ten feet, nine inches long, as of the year 1951. Neither record seems likely to be broken easily.

Categorized by ichthyologist as the family *Istiophoridae*, it is a cousin to the famed marlin and the broadbill swordfish, its little but mighty counterpart. My largest was 108 pounds, and I'd have sworn the hour-long battle was over six hours of heart-throbbing, wrist-wrenching exercise. I took it some distance north of Acapulco, in Mexico, and I'll never forget it. It was just

one of those things that happen to a man goofy enough to admit he is a so-called outdoors writer, or, for that matter, to admit to the somewhat dubiously regarded profession of writing at all.

I happened to mention to a couple of Mexican-American friends that I liked to write about my hunting and fishing escapades, and the next thing I knew I was joined by a rum-addled lawyer who was supposed to be a great sportsman. He told me he had shot over 150 ducks in one day, 200 band-tailed pigeons in the same time, 7 deer, and had taken over 20 sailfish between dawn and dusk. Familiar with his type of North American sporting manhood, I was disgusted, but the tales of sailfish did interest me, and I did know, from his descriptions, that he had caught many of them. Sailfish were to me, at that time, the most marvelous subjects of game-fish movies I'd ever seen, nothing less.

First (we'll just call him "Doc"), Doc asked me if I could be sure of getting a story published in a national hunting and fishing magazine with a picture of him. I told him nothing was less sure on earth, even book editors were hard to satisfy. He seemed crestfallen, but on considering the uncertainties of life and the tastes of sporting magazines, he suggested he might spend some time and take me out in his yacht, which later turned out to be a converted fish boat. Sailfish, he said, were easy to catch. Would I pay my own expenses? I assured him I would pay his too, to catch a sailfish. He seemed mollified and poured out another half gallon of my rum.

Doc had assured me that his wife had often caught sailfish with a handline trolled off the stern of his yacht. He made elaborate plans for the trip to Acapulco, which I certified when he was passably sober the following morning. The next week end I was ready on Friday afternoon, packed and waiting. Doc didn't arrive. Late Saturday night he sent a message to Cuernavaca that he wouldn't be able to go on Friday afternoon as planned, but *next* week! I guess Doc got his numbers mixed, because he didn't show the next week end at all. The following week end he arrived and said his boat was undergoing repairs, but next week end I said, "No thanks, Doc. You stick to the

bottle. I'll go sailfishing myself." I was mad. So mad that Thelma, my wife, quietly packed the car while I meandered around the patio and cussed. She came up and put a quiet hand on my arm.

"Come on, Michael," she said. "We're going to Acapulco and you're going sailfishing! The children are waiting in the car."

I didn't argue much, even though I knew I was holding up other vacation plans, for which we had already budgeted. The following day I sauntered around the waterfront as the sun went down. Acapulco was beautiful, and I saw a boat come in with a sailfish or two across the stern. That settled it. I got one good look at three sailfish down at the charter dock and decided I'd go, even if I had to do so in a rowboat. At the hotel court there was an old American couple who knew a Mexican who had an outboard motorboat that he used when he came down from Mexico, D. F., on the week ends, and which he had put at their disposal. They asked me if I'd like it. Would I! I'd have gone after sailfish in a wooden tub!

The following morning bright and early, I wandered up to the iron gate of Sr. Salenas' hacienda, and Pancho, his gardener and caretaker, had a gleam in his eyes. He took me to the jetty where the boat was pulled up, and we dumped a can of gasoline aboard along with a sailfish rod and reel I had managed to rent for a day. Pancho, it seemed, liked fishing. When I told him it was sailfishing I was after he almost fell out of the boat. Sailfishing! In a sixteen-foot runabout? *Sí. Sí* Not *sailfish*? *Sí*, Pancho. Sailfish! *Caramba!* The señor was loco! No? Loco, yes! We headed up coast.

We cruised north for almost four hours at a good speed and caught a few mullet for bait. The sea was barely ruffled in the scant breeze, but the gentle rocking motion of the boat lulled Pancho to sleep occasionally. Not me, though. Every piece of flotsam was a sailfish tail, yet the dragging bait at the stern kept skipping merrily free over the water. At noon I had given up and turned the boat around. Twice I had seen marlin tails, or big dorsal fins, but I didn't have the nerve to go near them.

It happened suddenly, out of the clear blue of the ocean. I

had stopped the motor and was filling up the tank from the extra gasoline tin. My rod was lying over the side of the boat, the line sunk well below the surface. The rod tip snapped down, the ratchet screeched, and the butt of the rod lifted and thumped on the planking. I dropped the gasoline can and grabbed at the jumping tackle with a nervous feeling in my diaphragm. All I could think of was that \$150 worth of tackle was going overboard into the depths of the salt chuck. My hand gripped the rod around the center, and the line burned through my palm. Pancho woke up with a start and yelled something. I held on and thought immediately of sharks. Nothing showed on the surface as I slipped the butt of the rod into the belly socket and snapped on the fastener.

"Start the motor! *Andale! Andale! Andale!*" I yelled at Pancho.

The gasoline tin was emptying into the bottom of the boat. He grappled with it, and pulled the rope on the motor with the throttle down. The boat lit out like a racehorse at full speed. I looked down and saw a big black torpedo pass us as if we were standing still. It was no shark. That much I knew.

Pancho swerved the boat against the line and involuntarily I jerked the slack in taut. The pull was tremendous, like nothing I had ever felt before, except a marlin's power. The reel started to sing, and with a tremendous splash a fish shot out of the water two hundred yards away. It looked as big as a whale, and thinking it was a marlin, I almost decided to cut the line. Pancho yelled encouragement.

"Sailfish! *Grande!*" he fairly screamed in Spanish.

The rod was like a living, twisting thing in my hands as a wave of determination filled me. I began to wind in tight, and the sailfish jumped clear of the water and started to dance on its tail, almost falling back into the water, then just about the time the head came down to meet the white froth, it would throw itself again in an upright position. It was wonderful to me. Except in marlin, I'd never seen anything quite to match it—such power, viciousness, agility in a fish that I couldn't believe my eyes. The fish went down in a run.



My eyes had been glued to the dancing antics and I had forgotten to take up slack. When it ran, the line started to spin off the drum so fast that I could have sworn I saw smoke from the axles. I just increased the drag and let it go. There was no way I could stop the tremendous power of that sailfish. The drum became almost bare and Pancho seemed to sense my predicament, because he swung the boat into the direction of the line at almost full speed. I began slowly to gain ground in my furious attempt to wind. Three hundred yards away, the fish hit the surface again, skipping like a flying fish, and I saw that the line had a big belly in it. My arms were aching, my fingers sore, and my stomach felt as if it had a swarm of cold bees crawling and buzzing in it.

The fish sounded right after that, and I don't think there was twenty yards of line between me and losing the fish for good when it stopped and sulked. I wound and heaved on the rod, wound and heaved on the rod, wound and heaved. About fifty yards away, I saw the fish break water and got a good look at it for the first time. It was a beauty, over seven feet long, a beautiful blue, and as sharp looking as a rapier. It went up in the air twice more, then ran a couple of times with a tremendous jerking motion against the line. Slowly we wound up to it and I saw it sulking about four feet down. It looked as big as a house, but amazingly narrow in the body. The sail was up, and from the side it had the appearance of a full-rigged schooner. The bill was black and dangerous looking. Tentatively I grabbed the leader and looked at Pancho. His eyes were open in amazement, and I think had a little of the same uneasiness which I had.

Slowly I drew the big fish alongside. Just at the edge of the boat, it gave a terrific downward heave and sailed off as if it was fresh as a daisy. Finally I got it alongside, and Pancho grabbed the bill and held on. The big fish slashed around, driving water over the gunwales, I hit it with a heavy gaff pole. Pancho let go with a yell, and the fish turned on its side with the white of the belly showing. Characteristic of all fish that are through, this action made me reach for the bill and start to pull it, quivering, into the boat. It wasn't quivering any more than I was. I hit it a

couple of more times with the gaff end but my heart wasn't in it. Pancho and I stared at it with a compassion beyond any words. He nodded his head and ran his hand down the sleek blue side.

"*Se mató. Qué doloroso!*" he murmured. "*No es verdad?*"

My head nodded in agreement with his words, which meant, literally, "It killed itself. How sad. Do you not agree?" We pulled it inboard and shoved the bill under the seat, tying the tail to the side. It was over seven feet long, 108 pounds in weight, and the most beautiful color imaginable. I lifted the sail to its full height and marvelled at the voluminous size of it. The color was bluish purple, with darker spots on it.

The sail on a sailfish has caused many people to argue as to its use to the fish. Some say it acts as a rudder, others as a means of propulsion, still others claim it is used to stop the long rushes and swerve quickly, as the fish does before it jumps. I have never seen it raised above the water, a phenomenon recounted in stories of the fish, but it is said to lie still on the surface with the sail above water as if using it to catch the wind for propulsion. I have even heard that sailfish will band up in groups, with several of them circling smaller fry and herding them into a pocket, using their sails as a corral. Frankly, I don't know. But, as I examined the big fin, I notice it fitted almost snugly into a sort of depression along the backbone, which resulted in a still further streamlining of an already sleek body.

We stayed a week at Acapulco, and I took two more fish, both smaller than the one I had first hooked into. I lost three by trying to set the hook as soon as the fish hit.

I know about as much about sailfishing as I do about the theory of relativity, so what I tell about methods of catching them can be discounted as amateurish. I listened to a lot of talk in Acapulco and Vera Cruz. There seem to be a couple of rules that are always followed. The sailfish usually strikes with its bill at the moving bait, then, satisfied that he has killed it, he darts back and takes it in his mouth. From the moment of this slap with the bill, the line must be allowed to flow free for at least ten, and sometimes thirty, seconds. At the end of that time, the angler snaps the rod up to set the hook deep in the jaw.

What happens after that is up to the fish and angler. No two fish will respond exactly alike. Some will jump immediately and stay close to the boat. Others will run, jump, and skip intermittently, still others will sound and stay down until they are bodily hauled to the surface. The one thing sure is that you must let your line go fairly free for the first run, just keeping bare tension on the reel.

Most big-game fishing is done from regular charter boats, unless the angler lives in the area and owns his own boat. The crew of the boat will always gladly instruct the tyro angler in ethics and methods. Bait is usually supplied, and mullet, ballao, pilchards, flying fish, mackerel, and many other small fish are used. I tried a feather lure for half a day without success, then switched to a small mackerel and hooked my third fish almost within minutes. It would seem that bait is best. There is a common practice of putting out "teasers" or "attracters" near the boat to attract the fish. When drawn away at the first sign of a rush, these devices are supposed to drive the fish into a frenzy, which in turn makes the fish hit the real bait with a sudden, ferocious attack, thus leading to an easy setting of the hook. The fishing equipment is of special quality, the rods fairly short and strong, the reels like miniature winch drums, the line from six-thread up, the leader usually steel, to avoid the fish's cutting teeth. Usually a rig is worn by the angler, with a socket set about the waist in which to insert the butt of the rod for heavy winding.

One thing is sure about sailfishing. If you strike one and hold it, you will never forget the experience.

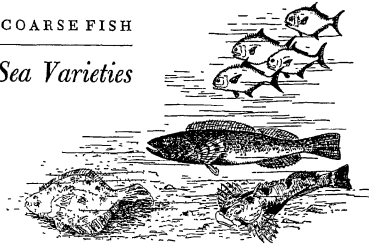


PART II

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*Coarse Fish*



34 : *Sea Varieties*

THERE IS probably no lovelier way to spend a day than just muckin' around on the beach, with the ocean laving at your bare feet, and a chunk of old handline in your expectant hands. If you feel a trifle more energetic, a long surf casting rod will give you a true sporting touch, and you can catch the most amazing things. Rockfish, black bass, sea perch, tommy cod, flounder, sculpin, starfish, eel, sole—all come to still bait, as do a thousand others, all edible, if somewhat grotesque and sluggish fish, some of them not too sluggish. Commonly called coarse fish, many of them are as highly esteemed on the table as the faster sporting fish. Actually, they are not coarse fish at all, some of them being delicately flavored and finely fleshed.

The main difference between a coarse fish and a sporting fish is that a sporting fish will take a moving lure readily, whereas a coarse fish will more often take a still or ground bait. There are fish that fall so close, either way, that sportsmen the world over argue as to what is game and what is coarse. For instance, I have caught many black sea bass on the Pacific Coast and found them truly as sporting as any trout or lake bass, yet for the purposes of sport they are classed as coarse fish. Unprotected by limits or seasons (except commercially), these coarse fish may one day be the only sport we have left. As they are abundant, the commercial fisherman rapes the oceans and bays with such nets as purse and drag seines, while little notice is

taken of the terrific hauls and flagrant waste. Many sportsmen scorn them, but actually, for the little guy who just likes to fish for anything, they are a source of untold enjoyment. I'd be a liar if I said I wasn't as happy dawdling along the shore with my wife and two children, Pam and Grant, handlines chucked out, as I am when I'm after salmon or swordfish. The constant wondering what you will pull in next, the laughter of the children as a pig-headed old bull cod or a slob of a sea caterpillar comes in on your line, provide a quiet, fully enjoyed thrill.

Generally speaking, any form of meat will catch coarse fish, from the rind off bacon to the wiggling, biting sea worm. If you catch one coarse fish you have the bait for another. However, there are more refined and surer ways of catching them. On most quiet beaches which do not get the full brunt of storms, there are clams or mussels and sea worms. I have found that the meat of a crustacean of any kind is equal to the sea worm. Like crustaceans, there are many forms of sea worms, too many to chart in this type of work.

I am often amused about what happened when one day I was asked by an Englishman, just out from his homeland, about the bait I was using. I told him I was using mussels. He admired my catch of silver perch and rock cod, then, like most Englishmen, he thanked me, and, with the true deference due a fellow sportsman, he went some distance away and began fishing quietly on his own. About an hour later I went down to see what he had caught. There were no fish about him, which caused me to make the obvious remark, "No luck?"

He smiled at me politely and replied that he didn't seem to be having any luck, that he had followed my advice, but the fish didn't seem to "take" for him. While I was there, he pulled in his line to show me that he had followed directions. I almost sputtered when I saw his hooks. Both of them had a very hard-shelled mussel clamped about the hooks, the casings *unbroken*. It would have taken a fish with the powerful jaws of a barracuda or needlefish to crack the tough shells. When I explained to him that the armor plate must be removed, he laughed heartily at himself.



"I didn't think that quite *sporting*," he apologized.

When I explained to him that it is only *after* the flesh is removed from the shellfish that the oils and juices will disseminate in the waters and attract the other fish, he saw the sense of it. I also explained to him that most coarse fish do not have extremely powerful jaws, and may have very small mouths that would not take a good-sized mussel. A short time later he pulled in a lovely big rock cod (or rockfish), and I don't think I have ever seen a happier fellow. So remember, always remove the wrappings on hard-shelled baits.

### ROCKFISH

There are many species and subspecies of rockfish of the order of *Acanthopteri*, some of them being, to the unpracticed eye, almost indiscernible in structure from lake bass. I have caught so many different rockfish that, frankly, I get a little amazed over the variety. The best method of taking them has invariably been with a bait of sea worms suspended from a boat, pier float, or rocky shoreline, using an occasional movement of the bait up and down to attract them. I have also taken them while trolling, and by jugging them with a cork impaled with a couple of white feathers. In jugging, the process is to let the line down in fairly deep water (from fifteen to five hundred feet), let it hit bottom, then raise it about two arm lengths and continue to move it up and down with a slow, pumping movement. They are not ground feeders to the extent that the soles and flounders are. I have spent hours watching them from pierheads, floats, and boats. They cruise lazily along among the aquatic growths, nosing the stems and fronds, much like a dog smelling trees, about one to five feet from bottom. They can move with amazing speed when disturbed, and sometimes rush at a bait with quite a strike. Other times they will nose up to a bait, sniff at it, and back away. If the bait is moved fairly quickly, they will usually strike. It is best to let them run a few feet with the lure, then give a good, hard yank. They have very hard mouths so the hook needs a good set. After the first lunge and few yanks, they

will subside and allow themselves to be drawn in, making the fisherman think he has lost them. Just near the top of the water, they will often raise a good fuss and take another rush. Invariably, just as they are lifted from the water, they will give the greatest struggle of their existence, but that is too late, unless the line is very light. I have caught many rockfish that have put up as much fight as any lake bass, and they go up to six or seven pounds apiece.

When trolling deep for salmon, rockfish many times will take the spoon. Light tackle and rods will produce most sport. They feed on crustaceans, mussels, small fish, almost anything in the ocean. Ugly to look at by normal standards, with a big head and eyes, they should be handled carefully because of the barbed dorsal fins. Baked after scaling, there is no more delicious white meat on any fish.

#### SOLES, FLOUNDERS, AND HALIBUT

The first two are fish that start out in life like any other fish, then decide to be different. As fingerlings, they swim in a vertical position for a short period, then nature takes a hand and the eyes change position to one side of the body, at which time the other side becomes the belly. The vent is on the side, like an exhaust on a motorboat, and they inhabit the floor of the ocean for the rest of their mature lives. Known as ground feeders, they are invariably caught on the bottom, as are halibut, too. I have in clear water seen them rise to a height of several feet in pursuit of a lifted bait, but only after they have been assured, by nosing the bait, that it is suitable to their tastes.

The top side of the fish is usually a sandy or muddy color, with a variation of spots, the belly a lifeless white or gray color from lying on the bottom. The mouth is small by comparison with other fish, and, with the exception of the halibut, a very small hook and bait are best. Because they feed on the bottom, it is better if the bait is allowed to remain, if not actually on the bottom, then not more than two or three inches away from it. They are the fish that keep the seas cleaned of animal residue, and will eat almost anything from a chunk of liver to an occa-

sional metal lure that is not moved too quickly. I have taken them on the soft insides of shellfish, worms, and pieces of other fish, and find that a small, soft bait is the best.

Probably a handline is the best method, either tossed out from a sandy beach or lowered from a boat. The bite of soles, flounders, and halibut, is often imperceptible, or just a little insistent wiggle or tug. It is better to let them take the bait for a few seconds, or even minutes, because they are not scared by the presence of a hook, then, when you feel an insistent pull or wiggle, give a good short yank to set the hook. They usually will run only a few feet. After that the line feels as if you were hooked to some loose material. The pull is quite heavy in comparison with the size of the fish, since they curve their bodies in an arc in order to create resistance to the pull of the line. Often they do not wiggle, or attempt to run, even when pulled from the water.

The thrill of catching them comes with the anticipation of the good meal they will produce on your table. This, of course, does not apply to the halibut, which go up to seven hundred pounds. I often laugh at an experience I had with a halibut. I was up near Alaska on a coho salmon seiner, which had anchored off the mouth of a nameless river. I decided to try a very large chunk of pink salmon on a thick piece of cuttyhunk. After tossing the crudely baited hook and line overboard, I lazed back on the deck and snoozed. Some time later, I noticed the forty foot boat was not hanging with the current, so looked at my line.

It was stretched out to one side, holding the boat against the faint tide. I pulled on it and thought it had become snagged to a log. I yarded the line in, but suddenly it became slack, causing me to believe the hook had come loose from the snag. In the midst of a strong pull, I felt a tremendous yank that seemed like the sudden raising of a scared horse's head when the bridle is wrapped around the hand. I couldn't believe it. I pulled hard again, and the line burned a chunk right out of my index finger, followed by a steady, hard pull away, right afterwards. I pulled steadily while the tremendous downward jerks took more skin off my fingers.

## BOOK II : *Fishing*

Eventually I had what proved to be a 120-pound halibut up to the side of the boat. I hollered for the cook, a big Swede who was on board. It was all the two of us could do to land the fish on the back deck with a pike pole. The fish started to flop about the deck, pounding the planking with its big head and tail, so that it sounded as if it were going through. Chris, the cook, had visions of its going through the deck, or overboard, so he pounded it on the head with a winch bar that was handy, but in some manner he hit the body just short of the tail.

The next thing I knew, the great body flapped its tail and Chris went sailing over into the water. He weighed almost two hundred pounds, which indicates to all and sundry how much power the big fish had. I remember another fisherman's telling me how he and his partner got a 450-pound halibut into an eight-foot rowboat. They were rowing for shore, when suddenly the fish decided it didn't like fresh air. Its first lunge threw his partner out into the water and tore the back seat out. Left alone, the fisherman rowed desperately for shore, while the fish became ever more anxious. Then the halibut tossed him and the rowing seat out and began to pound the planks out of the boat. By the time he and his partner had towed the boat to shore, by swimming with the painter, the seats were all out and the planking was coming loose from the ribbing. The moral seems to be clear.

On the table, soles, flounders, and halibut are endorsed by the whole world. They are featured items on almost every good restaurant menu, a delicacy of white-fleshed fish that can be cooked in a hundred different ways.

I remember that my Dad always used to jab his knife into the head, just at the juncture of the spine and brain, to open the fish up and let the blood run out. He was a confident believer that this improved the delicacy of the flesh for eating.

The best and most likely place for catching them seems to be the sandy beaches, or in bays that have flat bottoms. At low tide it is good sport to wade about, waist deep, with a spear in hand, and watch the sandy patches between the growths of sea

weed. I have speared many of these fishes that way, and have found the going both energy-consuming and sporting.

### PERCH

The perch is listed among the surf fishes or the family of *Embiotocidae*, a viviparous species which hatches its young within the body and brings them forth alive. From the "shiner" fully matured at three inches to the "silver bass," which grows in excess of eighteen inches, there are many variations in size and hue. Most commonly there are the three varieties, easily distinguishable from each other: the smallest shiner, an ideal rock-fish or lng bait, the medium-sized rainbow perch, or "bass", and the silver perch, or "bass," usually the larger fish.

On the Pacific Coast, they extend from Japan through the Bering Sea to the lower coast of California, with a tendency to seek out bays and inlets, even going up into rivers. Their feed is small crustaceans and invertebrates, and they take a piece of shellfish or worm on a hook very readily. Commonly seen nosing about piles and pier ends, they range from just above the bottom almost to the surface. I have noticed that they will act much the same as trout and lake bass, sometimes nosing up to a bait and then backing away suspiciously, not to bite again. If the bait is put down beside them, they will often shy off and the school will disappear; other times they will fight for it, usually with one nosing up to the lure while the others stand off; then, when it is taken, the others will rush at it.

They have comparatively small mouths and therefore need a small hook and tiny, soft bait. It is hard to judge the pull of any but a large fish, but I have taken silver and rainbow perch on a trout rod, and have found that they can give just as strong a battle as a trout does in open water. They are very fast, and will take out twenty to forty yards of line in a pull. However, they seldom make more than one or two runs, then come in with an occasional jerk and wiggle. Quite a pretty fish, they can be likened in shape to a plain goldfish, and the color varies from bright silver to a very pretty variegated purple, yellow, and orange.

On the table they are nothing to rave about, but they are pleasant and nourishing. They have many bones, and should be filleted for the most satisfying meal.

#### LING COD AND SCULPINS

Although these two fish are not of the same genera, they have much the same habits, as far as the fisherman is concerned. The sculpin, or bullhead, as he is commonly called, is probably more of a ground feeder, and certainly less active than the ling when hooked. They will both take any edible bait that is extended, and I have taken both the ling and the sculpin on trolled lures, have even taken a sculpin on a fly while fishing for black sea bass. Both will take any meat that will fit in their mouths, and the best bait for a really big ling is a smaller ling. While I have actually taken up a line upon which a small sculpin had taken the hook, a larger one had taken the small sculpin, and a still larger sculpin had taken the second fish, I don't expect anyone to believe this except me. Yes, three fish on one hook! I don't care if you believe it, and I probably wouldn't if you told me the story.

Sculpin of many species and subspecies are almost everywhere that other sea fish live, while many of them exist in lakes, rivers, and streams. A line tossed out of a boat, off a wharf or beach, will invariably bring in some form of them.

Lings usually reside around kelp beds, off rocky points, and in deep bays. They will run over sixty pounds in weight and are a very fine eating fish, a common item on restaurant menus. Like the sculpin they are large headed and narrow bodied. The ling will take a trolled or cast lure almost as readily as the sporting fish will and puts up a battle that is very similar to that of the pike of the inland waters. Rapaciously greedy, they take lures with a fierce lunge and a fairly short run. They sometimes battle all the way in, and at other times come in with only angry jerks to let you know you still have them. On being lifted out of the water, they will sometimes let go of the bait, onto which they have been holding like a bulldog, but they usually raise a fuss just at the surface. The mouth is unbelievably big. When the

hook is set in the throat, it is easy to put the hand in and remove it. The teeth are sharp, so that a big fish can give a nasty bite. I still claim to be the only man who was fished by a fish, and it was a *ling* that gave me that distinction.

I was spearing fish along the shores of Savary Island, in the north British Columbia waters, carefully sneaking up on a two-foot flounder. As I approached the fish lying still on the bottom, I noticed what I thought was a sunken log, lying close to the edge of the seaweed. Tense, moving stealthily through the water, I was keyed to a high pitch for the lunge with the spear at the dozing flounder. At the precise moment that I pitched my spear, something hit my ankle as if with a hatchet. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the three-foot, blackish thing about where my ankle *had been*. Had been, I say. My chum, Frank Smith, who was dozing on the bow of my boat, says my blood-curdling whoop lifted him clear off the deck and into the water. He swears I lifted right up out of the chest-deep water in a lather of spray, walked on top of a trail of foam until I was ten feet up the beach, and had to step down two feet to get to the sand. I think he exaggerates a little. It was probably only a foot I had to step down.

Anyway that bloody ling cod had *stalked me* while I was stalking the flounder. It had hit me at the crucial moment, cutting a two-inch gash in my ankle that bled like the wound in a stuck pig. So never underestimate the sporting qualities of a ling. And there isn't any table fish that is sweeter, juicier, or more white-fleshed when stuffed and baked.

#### BLACK SEA BASS

This fish is actually a rockfish, but so different in sporting qualities from any of the others that it is a shame that it has been relegated to the coarse fish by snobbish sportsmen. It is properly known as the black rockfish, *Sebastes melanops*, but under any name it is a sporting fish and a wonderful fighter. Common to the Pacific Coast, from Alaska to California, it is plentiful where the surf lashes the rocks.

I caught my first black sea bass while trolling on the open Pacific, in the vicinity of Egg Island, northern British Columbia. Trolling a No. 3 Diamond Spoon, I thought the hook was in a small coho salmon. The light was almost gone and I had seen the surface boil with jumping herring, then there was a surge on my reel and a prolonged rush. In the few minutes that I fought it, the rod bent like a reed and the line sang in speedy long-distance rushes. It was with amazement that I boated a thick shouldered black bass, no more than three pounds in weight. Before dark, I had taken two more, and was utterly amazed that I had never even heard of the prowess of the fish.

Many times later, I saw the thousands of herring hiss above the silent water, when schooled up in bays, rushed by black sea bass. The bass school them into a small tidal bay, then rush into the seething masses, striking like lightning, rushing back and forth to gobble up the fish they have maimed in the first charge. The herring break the surface in thousands, sounding like a fire hose suddenly sprayed on the water. It is a good time to get out your rod. Any lure that wiggles will do the trick, from a white bucktail fly to a quarter-by-three-inch strip of your shirt. Often I would give the newly caught fish a good squeeze, and then use the disgorged herring for a bait. But I'll have to admit I had almost consumed both tails of an old white dress shirt that I used for fishing.

The fish seem to approach the rocky shorelines late in the evening, just after the sun has set, regardless of the position of the tide. Casting a twenty-foot strip of line will take the lure out far enough, and it is very much better to bring it in with a fairly quick lifting of the rod tip, to jerk the line. Don't worry about pulling the bait away from them. I have several times had the fish in mid-air after the withdrawn lure, dropped it quickly, and had them hit as soon as it touched the water. Actually, I remember one three-pounder that jumped all of six feet along the waves, and when my strip of cotton hit the top of another wave, the fish caught it before it sank. Frankly, I have never seen a trout equal that feat, which is a quite common occurrence among sea bass.



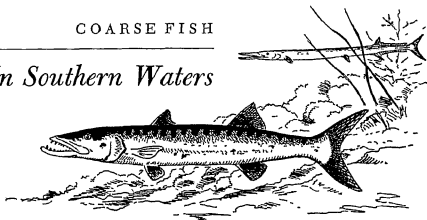
Going upwards of six pounds in weight, the black sea bass is built like a good fighter, all shoulders and very slim hips. The head is small and the tail and fins are powerful. Quite gray-black in color, the fish has white flesh, and very fine eating it is. When freshly caught, they skin more easily than they scale. Good, heavy fillets come out of the back. Fried in batter and butter, or plain with parsley or garlic sauce, they are a treasure to eat.

If you have a fly rod that you think is fitting only for trout, try it out on black bass sometime. You may have to have it mended sooner than you ever will on trout.

#### P O M P A N O

I have seen these fish both in California and off the Atlantic Coast of Mexico, despite the fact that some ichthyologists believe they exist only in the Atlantic. There are many species and subspecies, called by a hundred different names. A bright silvery fish, thin in comparison to its depth, it is a creature of southern waters. Like the sea perch, it is just short of being a game fish, because it is a crustacean feeder, a lover of cracked shellfish and worms. Because it has a small mouth, it must be treated to small bait and a tiny hook. It will nose up to a bait and ignore it sometimes, while on other occasions it will be found biting freely on a dangled bait with a very fine leader. When hooked, it runs with a vibration you can feel on the line, a short series of darts will be all, then a bit of a fuss as it leaves the water.

As a food fish it leaves nothing to be desired, tasty, and juicy, it is cooked in many different styles, and has a firm white meat. It has helped to make Arnaud's, Antoine's, and Galatoire's in New Orleans three of the most famous restaurants in the world.

35 : *In Southern Waters*

IN THE COUNTRY we grew to think of trout and salmon as the only real game fish of the world, but nothing is as far short of the truth. The hundreds (or thousands) of fish of the south seas are not only equal, but more abundant, and in many cases just as game as, if not more so than, their northern cousins. The fishes I mean are tarpon, barracuda, needlefish, snook, weakfish, mackerel, bonitas, tunny, and several others. I have taken only a few of them, and I don't yet feel qualified to write a fully authentic chapter on them and their habits. To this end I will write only what I know.

## BARRACUDA

Probably the closest counterparts of the barracuda are the Northern pike and muskellunge. All three fish hit the bait with a parallel ferocity, fight with the same tactics, and give the fisherman a real run for his money. Perhaps the barracuda is the most vicious and best fighter, certainly the most dangerous to boat or meet while swimming. The family is *Sphyrænidae*, and its prime food is live or swimming fish. It grows to six feet in length and will take almost any moving lure that is tossed out to it, preferring a flesh bait such as squid, mullet, grunt, or a piece of almost any other fish.

I have caught them on the Pacific Coast on the shore of California, and on the Atlantic Coast on the shore line of Mexico. There does not appear to be much difference among them, to my

untrained eye, but they are all easily recognizable by their large mouths and terribly sharp teeth. The first barracuda to come to me was on a trolled line behind a launch near Long Beach, California. Used to catching salmon, and as we were all trolling a similar spinner with a chunk of bait on it, I thought at first I had hit into a salmon. The fish took the lure with a sudden wiggling surge that vibrated the line off the spool. It broke water then sulked with gradually diminishing charges, then came in almost docilely. I yanked a three-foot monster onto the deck to the discomfiture of my host. He yelled at me as I reached for the hook.

"Godsakes, Mike," he warned. "Don't touch that fish!"

I looked up at him in amazement.

"Why?" I asked innocently.

"He'll bite your finger off," he stated. "Here. Hit him a good crack with the gaff, then stick the end of it in his mouth. You'll see *why*."

I did as I was told, and found out just why a man should not be too chummy with a barracuda. They have teeth like needle points, and by the way the stunned fish took hold of the gaff, puncturing the leather handle as if it was jelly, I saw why not to touch them before killing them. It is said that the barracuda has been responsible for taking an arm of a swimmer off at the shoulder. I don't think the fish could do that in one bite, but it could tear out a terrific chunk of flesh.

While I was in Mexico, fishing off the breakwater at Vera Cruz, I noticed the beach boys get out of the water with a certain amount of fright. I had been taking needlefish on a spinner baited with small shiners, and I wondered what the consternation was about. One of the boys pointed to the harbor entrance. Three barracuda, which were over four feet long, were cruising in the narrows toward the inner waters. The sight delighted me. I had on a eighteen-pound-test nylon line, a twelve-pound leader, and plenty of backing up to one hundred yards. I was going to add a barracuda to my gifts for the hotel cook.

My cast hit the water out ahead of the smallest fish, which appeared to be almost four feet, six inches at the least. The

## BOOK II : *Fishing*

barracuda sat motionless for several seconds, which made me think he had missed the sparkle of the spinner. I tried to retrieve quickly, in order to get a second cast over him and his companions before they slowly finned into the harbor. The barracuda I was after disappeared, so I figured that was that. It just disappeared before my eyes. Something hit the lure and it burned the line off the drum so fast that I couldn't even brake it with my thumb at full pressure.

The line sailed out the full length in a split second, as if I had been hooked onto a freight train. When it came to the end, the line snapped with a jerk that almost pulled me into the water. That was all.

I don't think that "cuda" even knew he had an eighteen-pound-test line on him at any time, and he couldn't have gone much more than twenty pounds himself. I caught a pair of two-and-three-footers later and they put up the same prolonged rush that is almost unstoppable with light tackle. The later rushes were fast, but not by comparison with the first lunge.

A steel leader is almost a necessity, and this should be placed at the extreme end, and a piece of light gut added in between the wire and the line swivel in order to save the line from breaking first. Gut won't stand up against the teeth of the barracuda when it is next to the lure. As previously stated, the "cuda," when in the mood, will take anything, including a swimmer's leg, but I found for my own fishing that an attracter, about one inch long, preferably a spinner with a bait, live or otherwise, behind it, was the most successful. The lure can be trolled, cast, or floated with the tide or current. All will bring barracuda. And, watch out for those teeth! They are dangerous.

As a food, the barracuda is excellent eating, well muscled, and good in any manner in which it is cooked. The idea that it is poisonous is ridiculous.

## NEEDLE FISH

My wife Thelma was standing with me on the breakwater which circles out to sea to form the bulwark of the Vera Cruz harbor

for deep-sea ships. We were just down from Puebla to see the Gulf of Mexico and enjoy the br  ze, but somehow or other my fishing rod had been slipped into the car. The immense long rollers were coursing along the stone and concrete wall, when I heard a hiss of disturbed water, thought I saw a flash of blue-silver, but it was so swift I wasn't sure. I turned to Thelma.

"Did you see anything, Hon?" I asked.

"I don't know. I heard a hiss of water or something."

We stood and watched the long roll of blue waves. There was another unmistakable hiss, like a spear thrown into the water, a flash of blue-white silver. That was all. We looked significantly at each other and shook our heads. Neither of us could identify anything. We walked out farther to look back against the sun.

"Good Lord! It's a fish doing that!" I cried unbelievably.

"I saw it!" Thelma exclaimed. "Hurry, get your rod!"

I was half way back to the hotel before Thelma had finished. The fish I had seen was like nothing in my book. It was long and almost round, with a swordfish nose, a powerful, wide tail, and it drove out of the water with such amazing speed that it could only be seen with the flash of light on it. It came out of one wave-top twenty feet back, then hit the curl of another wave with the swiftness of an arrow from a bow. Its re-entry into the water was what made the hiss. Such a fish could only be a game fish! I took five minutes getting my rod set up, as I was fearful that these fish would be gone when I got at them.

My first cast with a bright silver spinner into the rough water, between the breakwater and a reef, was taken before my line was half retrieved. For ten blazing seconds my line soared like a runaway logging haul-back, then the fish danced on its tail right along the top of the waves for over twenty feet. I shook with fighting thrill of it. The pull was stronger than a steelhead trout. My line went limp. I reeled in to find my leader was minus the spinner. Twice more I lost spinners to fish that felt as big as any salmon that ever roamed the Pacific. A kind-eyed old Mexican came up to me and casually took my lureless leader in his wrinkled old hands.

"*Se perdió, Señor,*" he consoled me. "*Tiene que usar metal.*"

He explained to me that the teeth of needlefish, or, as the Mexicans called them "*aguja*s" would cut a fiber leader in seconds. He was telling me! He reached in his back pocket and pulled out a short piece of fine wire, giving it to me. Mexicans are like that, casual, unusually friendly, and generous. I thanked him and put on the metal leader, with a bit of bait he had given me, attached to the spinner hook.

I took a three-foot needlefish on the second cast, and it took me twenty minutes to tame that blazing show of acrobatics and bring in the fish. It was almost an exact duplicate of the wondrous sailfish in the gymnastics of surface fighting, with long sustained rushes through the sea, smaller, but just as fierce by comparison. The ten fish I took in the next two hours gave my seven-foot casting rod and small, level-wind Pflueger reel a dustier workout than any bass or trout of the same weight ever had. I found that a small cutting of pompano on the spinner got me a needlefish in every decent cast made. The Mexicans on the breakwater had never seen a casting set-up the same as mine. They gathered around me like a forest as I fought the fish in, cheering me, laughing and gleeful as little boys. They wanted each retrieve to reveal the fishing outfit to some newcomer. They helped unhook every fish, with a certain amount of protection for me.

When my lure snaked out in a fifty-yard cast, I saw a needlefish that looked five feet long hit the air and foam up the wave tops with its broad, forked tail. It went down in a sudden, prolonged rush. My eighteen-pound-test nylon line ran to the end of the drum, then parted half way between me and the fish with a yank that confirmed the fact that this fish meant business. I picked up my tackle with a salute to the fish that made the Mexicans grin with me. Dividing the fish I had between them, despite their protests, I took one three-footer back to the hotel. In my book of fishes, the identity of the fighting stranger was made clear.

The needlefish is a common inhabitant of the southern oceans, of the family *Belonidae*, of which genera there are four

(two only in American waters), with about fifty species. They grow to five feet or more in length, and although well known, don't seem to be listed among game fishes. Frankly, I don't know why. There are none more sporting to my way of thinking, and they will work light tackle until it is red hot. The flesh is bluish-white, with greenish bones, which for some reason do not appeal to the gourmet, but nevertheless the flesh is delicious, firm, flaky, and as white as sun-dried linen when cooked.

Try them on a casting rod some day, but watch them. They are dangerous, both because of their powerful, small-toothed mouths and because of the sword-like jaws. It is commonly said that many fishermen in small boats are injured by needlefish jumping, in their arrow-like flight, out of the water and piercing the boatman with their sharp jaws. Once you have seen a needlefish bolt clear of the water, you will know how dangerous it can be to a man on the surface of the blue-water seas it inhabits.

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